

NEW



INSIDE HISTORY COLLECTION

CHRISTIANITY'S *dramatic history*

Who was Moses?

Judaism's early history is still full of mystery

Rich women helped Jesus:

Women paid for Christ's travel, food and lodging

Judas had his own followers:

His disciples went wild on a diet of pork, sex and murder

Witch hunts set Europe ablaze

Over 50,000 were burnt at the stake, accused of witchcraft and fornicating with the devil

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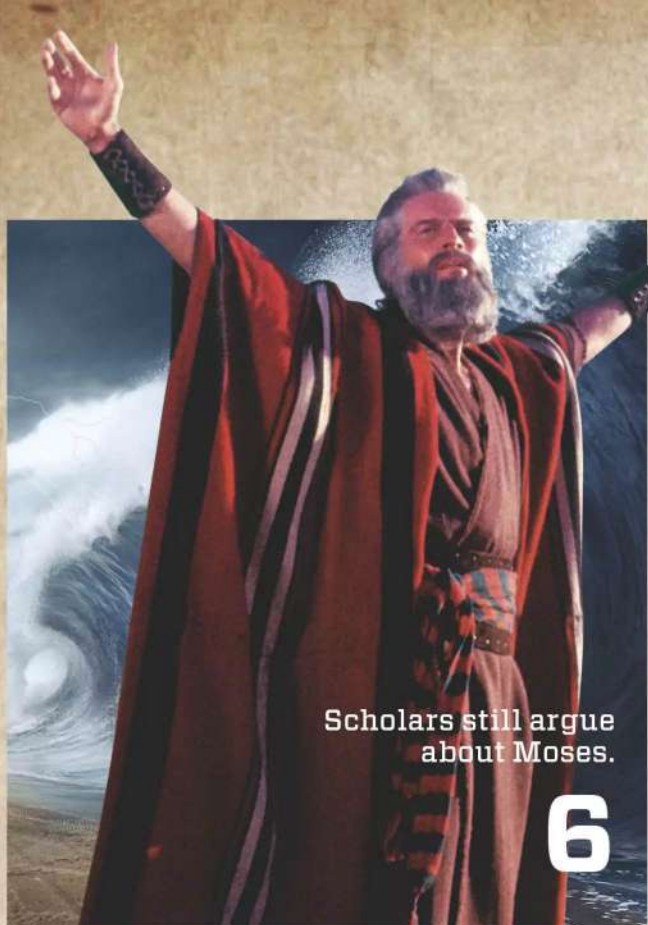




2,000 years of drama

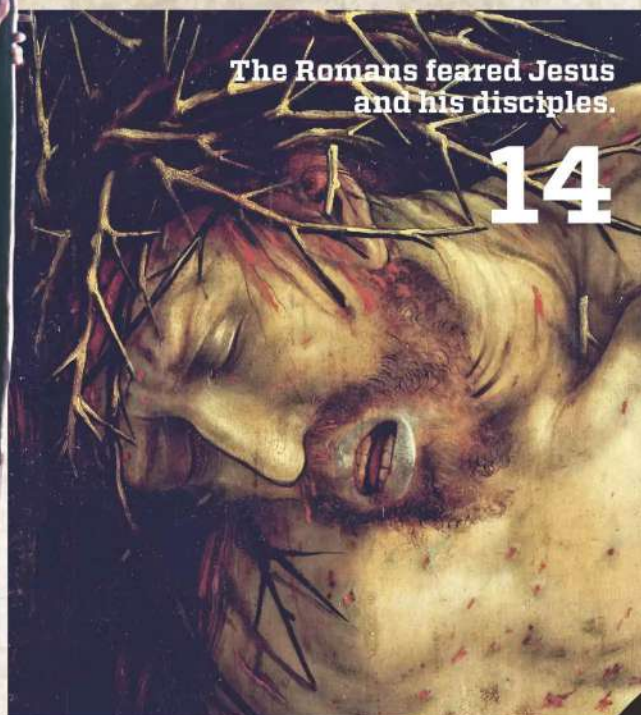
Over 2,000 years ago, a young man named Jesus Christ gathered a large group of followers who heard him speak of charity, equality and justice. Innocent words, you might think – but the Romans didn't see it that way. Fearing that the popular folk hero would lead his crowds to revolt against Rome's occupation of Palestine, the Romans sentenced him to death. Christ's story is recorded in the New Testament, which became the basis for the religion that followed. For thousands of years, words of love and compassion have been accompanied by bloody confrontations. Here we tell the dramatic story of Christianity from the very first Jews to the life of Jesus and his disciples, through witch burnings and creative monks to the Reformation, which split Europe into two camps.

Enjoy the issue!



Scholars still argue
about Moses.

6



The Romans feared Jesus
and his disciples.

14

Contents

Moses still
divides opinion

6

The historical Jesus

12

Jesus: apprentice
to an extremist

14

Disciples gave Jesus
eternal life

22

Thrown to the lions

24

Judas - the
unforgivable traitor

30

God's foremost PR agent

38

Mysterious book

46

Christ's greatest rival

50

The Church's dark secrets

56

50,000 burned at the stake

64

One god wasn't enough
after all

74

Cowl-clad builders

80

Who wrote the
Devil's Bible?

90

Never walk under ladders

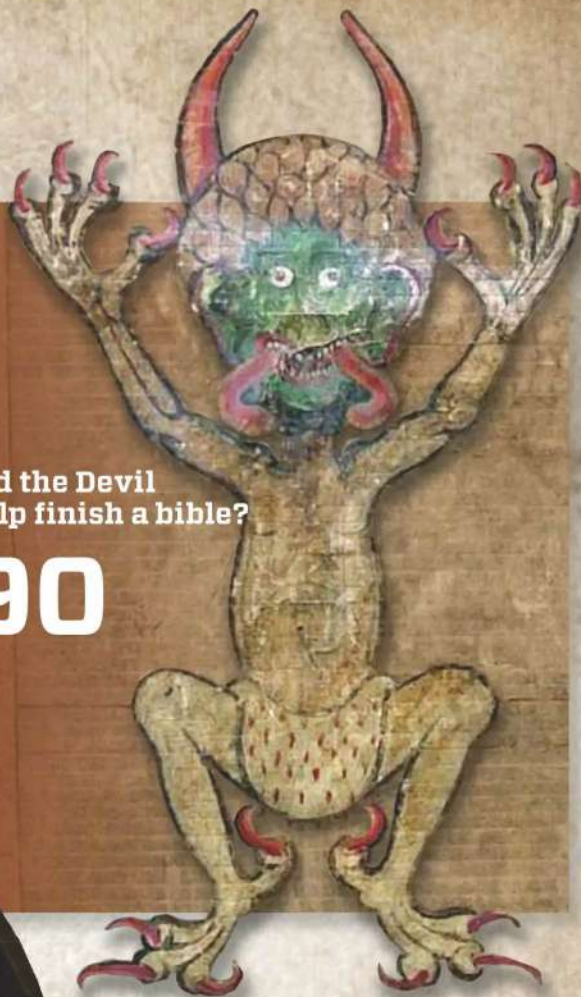
94





St Benedict's teachings were monastic rules of life.

80



Did the Devil help finish a bible?

90

The Reformation:
The battle for God's grace

98

Luther closed off a shortcut to heaven

100

Fields flowed with peasants' blood

110

In God's grip

114

MOSES DIVIDES

His story is well documented in the Bible, yet he remains conspicuously absent from other records. This inconsistency has led to one of the biggest debates among biblical scholars: is the story of Moses and the Israelite exodus true?

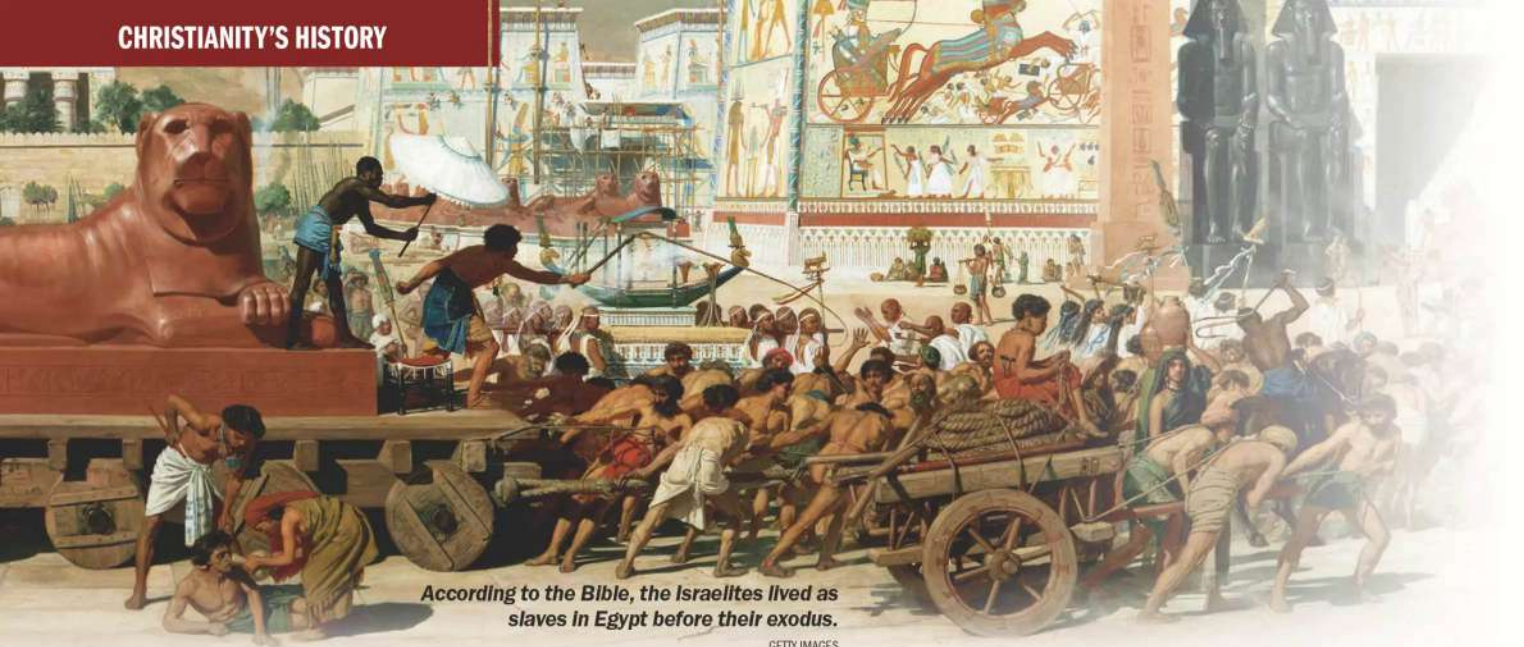
According to the Bible, God helped Moses part the waters of the Red Sea.

GETTY IMAGES & SHUTTERSTOCK

STILL OPINION

The Old Testament

describes how Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Together, they journeyed east with the Egyptian army at their heels. But Pharaoh's thousand-strong force was swallowed up by the waters of the Red Sea, and Moses continued his journey through the Sinai Desert. There, on Mount Sinai, he received the Ten Commandments from God before leading the Israelites towards Canaan in modern-day Palestine. Moses died before reaching the Promised Land, where the Israelites eventually settled.



According to the Bible, the Israelites lived as slaves in Egypt before their exodus.

GETTY IMAGES

BY TROELS LÜSSING & HENRIK ELLING
It's still a divisive issue among biblical scholars. Is the account of the Israelites' migration from Egypt – the Bible's eponymous exodus – fact or fiction? The story is one of the most important told in the Old Testament, but while devout believers accept the narrative as a literal truth, Egyptologists, archaeologists and historians continue the search for evidence to validate the events recounted in the book of Exodus that make up the story of Moses, one of the most pivotal events in Jewish history.

One thing is certain – to date, no one has found conclusive archaeological proof to corroborate the biblical depiction of Moses liberating his people from Egyptian bondage, leading them through the desert for 40 years, receiving the Ten Commandments atop Mount Sinai, and ultimately passing

away before reaching the promised land of Canaan, a place flowing with milk and honey.

According to the story, Moses was 80 years old when he travelled to Egypt to confront the pharaoh, where his people, the Israelites, had been enslaved for generations. Following a succession of devastating plagues, the pharaoh relented, releasing the Israelites and telling them to leave Egypt, saying "Rise up, and get you forth from among my people," thus marking the start of the exodus. However, it is far from certain when or even if the exodus chronicled in the Bible ever took place.

Calculating the timeline

Pinpointing the Bible's early chronology, including when Moses could have existed, is one of the greatest challenges for scholars. Without a date, it's almost

impossible to know where to look for evidence. Historians are forced to rely on ancient documents, like a 4,000-year-old papyrus alluding to Egyptian plagues, 3,700-year-old geological data indicating climate shifts that might have prompted the Israelites to migrate eastwards, away from the Nile delta, and a crucial 3,500-year-old Egyptian narrative detailing soldiers swept away by a massive tidal wave at Shi Hor [now Shamal Sina]. However, the scattered evidence, which spans 500 years, leaves much room for uncertainty, and scholars simply don't know if the Book of Exodus is a coherent narrative or a composite of different historical events

Moses is a mystery

While archaeologists work to verify the story's events, biblical scholars wrestle with the enigma of Moses himself. His absence from contemporary Egyptian texts deepens doubts about the accuracy of the Exodus narrative. Moses only

TEN PLAGUES

Over the last 20 years, scientists have worked to uncover plausible explanations for the ten plagues in the story of Moses. One theory suggests that a reddish algae may have triggered a domino effect, with each plague setting off the next in a chain reaction.

1 "All the waters in the river turned to blood"

According to the theory, the plagues were triggered by billions of **microscopic red algae that coloured the River Nile blood red**. The



Algae blooms periodically turn the Nile a reddish colour.

CORBIS/ALL OVER AND SHUTTERSTOCK

phenomenon – known as red tide – is prevalent along warm-water rivers and coasts. The algae bloom makes it impossible for fish and other organisms to survive and may explain why "the fish in the river died; and the river stank."

2 "Frogs shall come up ... upon the land of Egypt"

The sudden algae bloom caused hundreds of thousands of frogs to leave the Nile and swarm onto land. According to the Bible,

appears in Egyptian sources dating to around 200 BC – over a millennium after the Biblical story supposedly took place. The first five books of the Bible, including the story of Exodus, also emerged hundreds of years later, between 400-500 BC.

Nonetheless, the existence of Moses cannot be discounted. Many historical events, including the Jewish exodus, rely on single-source narratives, and it's not unusual for them to be recorded long after the events occurred.

Up to 250,000 soldiers disappeared

The lack of archaeological evidence has prompted scholars to scour the Bible for insights into the exodus. According to the Old Testament, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt towards the Red Sea, setting the stage for one of the Bible's most iconic narratives.

Pharaoh's pursuing army discovers Moses and his people camped by the sea. However, before it can attack, Moses stretches out his hand and parts the sea. He then guides the Israelites across the exposed seabed to safety. After their passage, the waters close in, engulfing Pharaoh's chariots and soldiers. According to Exodus 14:28: "The waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them."

This verse is perplexing to scholars who know from other sources that up to 250,000 soldiers served in the Egyptian military in the second millennium. However, despite extensive searches, archaeologists and divers have failed to unearth any evidence of this drowned army in the Red Sea. Considering the

Papyrus tells of death and destruction

The book of Exodus isn't the only text that talks about a blood-red Nile – an ancient Egyptian papyrus tells a similar tale.

"The river is blood" and "the flax and the barley were struck down". These phrases are taken from the Ipuwer Papyrus, an ancient document written almost 4,000 years ago. It depicts a beleaguered Egypt beset by warfare and natural disasters. Historians have long debated whether the papyrus substantiates

the biblical story of Moses. The consensus today is that the document offers scant evidence for the biblical plagues or the existence of the Israelites' saviour. Sceptics point to the fact that the papyrus fails to mention Moses by name and chiefly concerns an influx of people, not an exodus.



Today, the Ipuwer Papyrus is housed in the Netherlands' National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden.

scale of the purported event, the lack of evidence is suspicious. Moreover, the loss of such a vast army would have severely weakened Egypt at a time when it was known to be fighting a fierce war with the Hittites.

Misleading translation

One possible explanation is that the archaeologists have been looking in ►

the frogs died suddenly and "they gathered them together upon heaps". American biologists speculate that the frogs became ill due to the rotten fish that floated on the Nile.

3 "The dust of the earth ... became lice in man, and in beast"

Each autumn, as the Nile recedes, it leaves behind a landscape dotted with puddles – perfect breeding grounds for mosquitoes [an alternate translation of the Hebrew word *kinnim*]. Without their usual predators like fish and frogs, the mosquitoes would have proliferated at an alarming rate. At the same time, the decaying aquatic life would have drawn in swarms of other insects, exacerbating the situation.

4 "A ... swarm of flies [came] into ... Egypt"

According to the Bible, "there came a grievous swarm of flies into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt." **This infestation wasn't just plausible; it was highly likely** if a multitude of dead frogs and fish lay along the Nile.

5 "All the cattle of Egypt died"

Scripture recounts how Egyptian cattle were afflicted by disease, possibly **transmitted by the swarms of insects that likely bit and stung them while grazing in the fields**. However, there's no scientific explanation for why "all the cattle of Egypt ►



Two roads lead to Canaan

Archaeologists have attempted to reconstruct Moses' path through the desert and discovered two likely routes.

Escape from Egypt

The Israelites set out from the capital at the time, Pi-Ramesses. Excavations have revealed that the city, which was founded by Ramses II, had around 300,000 inhabitants during its heyday.

Through the Sea of Reeds

The sea Moses divided was possibly located in the shallow easternmost part of the Nile Delta.



Moses died on the way

At 120 years old, Moses died on Mount Nebo before the Israelites reached the Promised Land.

Where is the Mountain of God?

Scholars long believed it to be the 2,285-metre-high Mount Sinai. However, the discovery of stone pillars and an altar near Mount Har Karkom in present-day Israel has led to speculation that it is the Bible's mountain.

the wrong place thanks to a potential mistranslation in the Bible. The original Hebrew term for the body of water Moses crossed, *Yam Suf*, was interpreted as 'the Red Sea' by early translators, probably because they were familiar with this body of water. However, *Yam Suf* can also mean 'Sea of Reeds', suggesting it might refer to the shallow lakes and streams in the Nile Delta's north-west region of the Sinai Peninsula. Consequently, archaeologists

are now redirecting their efforts to the Sinai Desert in search of the remnants of the pharaoh's army.

Heavenly bread exists

With the 80-year-old Moses leading the way, the Israelites continued into the desert, where, according to the Bible, they spent 40 years. As their livestock dwindled, thirst and hunger must have plagued the "six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children."

By adding the likely numbers of women, children, and the elderly who would have accompanied the 600,000 men, scholars have extrapolated the number of Moses' total flock to be around two million people. If true, the column of Israelites must have stretched for almost 250 kilometres, and their camps would have been enormous.

Although the Bible doesn't reveal how many Israelites died of exhaustion, heatstroke and old age, it must have been a significant number. This has left archaeologists wondering why they have never found evidence of a massive population inhabiting the Sinai desert around 3-4,000 years ago.

Some scholars suggest the reason is that the biblical count of 600,000 is another mistranslation; the original Hebrew term, *eleph*, can denote either 'thousand' or 'clan.' If the latter interpretation holds true, there may have been only 600 families wandering the desert.

It's not a big stretch to imagine that the Israelites became nomadic Bedouins during this period, sustaining themselves on *mann*, a sweet secretion that is still harvested from tamarisk bushes in the Sinai Peninsula.

TEN PLAGUES

died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one."

6 "Boils broke out on people and animals"

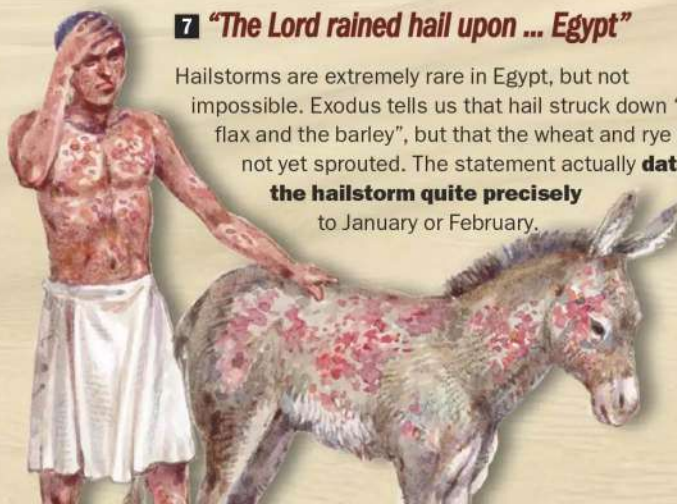
Similarly, **bubonic plague** struck the Egyptians. The human population – like the cattle – was infected by the swarms of insects.

7 "The Lord rained hail upon ... Egypt"

Hailstorms are extremely rare in Egypt, but not impossible. Exodus tells us that hail struck down "the flax and the barley", but that the wheat and rye had not yet sprouted. The statement actually **dates the hailstorm quite precisely** to January or February.

8 "Locusts went up over all the land of Egypt"

The hailstorms would have created muddy soil, offering **perfect breeding conditions for the locusts**, which arrive every March with the east wind.



Scholars speculate that the Israelites may have survived by eating secretions deposited on the tamarisk bush.

SHUTTERSTOCK



The Israelites supposedly lived on manna from heaven for 40 years in the desert.

GRANGER/POLFO

Collected at dawn and processed into a bread-like substance, *mann* could plausibly be the legendary manna described in the Bible that sustained the Israelites during their time in the desert.

Mountain of God discovered?

For a long time, archaeologists believed that Mount Sinai could be the Mountain of God where Moses received the Ten Commandments and inscribed the sacred laws on twin stone tablets. However, there's no archaeological evidence of human activity on the site until centuries after the birth of Christ.

A team of Italian archaeologists has since proposed Mount Har Karkom, standing at 487 meters in the southwest of Israel's Negev Desert, as the prospective Mountain of God. They have excavated 12 stone pillars and the remains of a stone altar near a Bronze Age campsite at the foot of the mountain. The archaeologists feel confident that they have found the sanctuary described in Exodus, where Moses erected an altar and 12 stone pillars to symbolise the 12 tribes of Israel. They have also found rock engravings with ten squares, which could be an allusion to the Ten

Commandments brought down from the mountain.

If Har Karkom is the mountain described in the Bible, the events of Exodus could be accurately dated to around 2200 BC, which is earlier than most scholars previously believed. As such, Moses' journey and life might form the historical foundation for the Egyptian Sinuhe myth from around 1900 BC, which tells the tale of an Egyptian official who fled to the land of Canaan and became a formidable figure who defeated a Syrian king in battle.

Moses died on Mount Nebo

While these small clues may support a literal interpretation of the Exodus narrative, scepticism prevails among scholars. Many argue that many of the events are implausible, including an octogenarian climbing a mountain and a two-million-strong population surviving on *mann* secretions on the few tamarisk bushes in the Sinai Desert. For others, the notion that a human could part the waters of a sea as Moses supposedly did is simply unbelievable.

For this reason, most scholars view the book of Exodus as a grand mythos detailing Israel's genesis and the inception of Judaism, not as a historically verifiable text.

Moses, as depicted, meets his demise before fulfilling his quest. His tale spans 120 years, starting from his humble beginnings in a Nile reed basket to his poignant end atop Mount Nebo. Before he dies, he glimpses the Promised Land, soon to be known as Israel, before passing the torch to Joshua, who completes the journey the elderly man began by leading the Israelites into Canaan.



Solomon came to power 480 years after Moses left Egypt.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Biblical timeline

If we take the Bible literally, the timing of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt is quite precise. Kings I states that the construction of the Great Temple in Jerusalem began in the fourth year of King Solomon's reign, 480 years after the Israelites left Egypt. Scholars know from other historical sources that Solomon's reign began around 970 BC, thereby placing the events of Exodus around 1450 BC.

9 "There was a thick darkness over all the land of Egypt for three days"

The **khamsin desert storm**, which often plagues the country in March, could have been responsible for three days of darkness. Since the locusts "did eat every herb of the land", the soil would have been drier than usual, and the powerful seasonal winds could have easily stirred up the ground, creating dust storms that turned the sky black.

10 "At midnight, the Lord smote all the firstborn"

The final plague poses the greatest challenge for scientists. It's speculated that food poisoning may have been the culprit behind the deaths. During times of famine, the first-born son typically had the privilege of claiming the last remaining grains. As a result, they may have unknowingly consumed grain reserves contaminated with a **toxic fungus** and died.



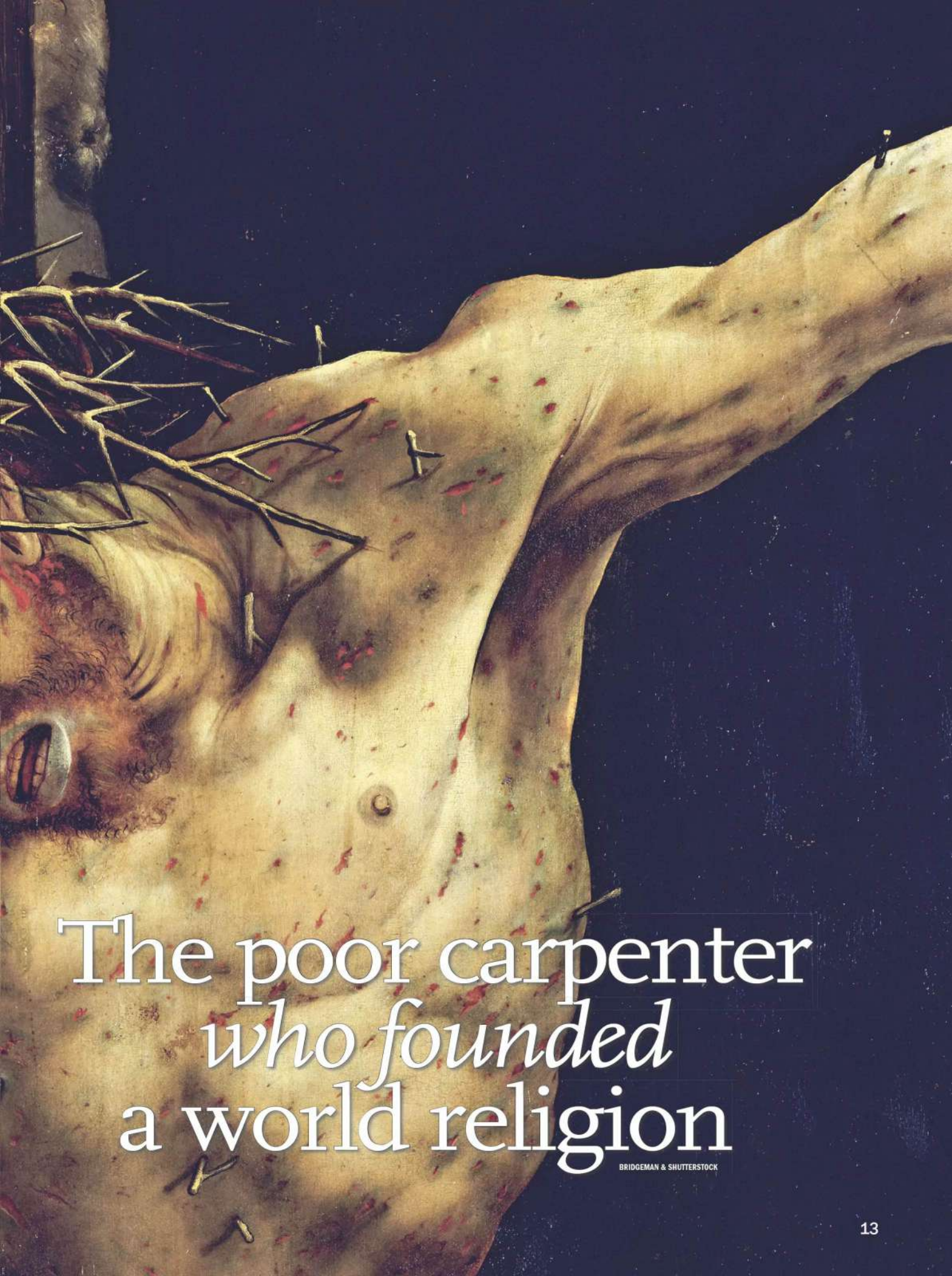
Could pharaoh's son and Egypt's other firstborn sons have died of food poisoning?

SHUTTERSTOCK, BRIDGEMAN AND GETTY IMAGES

BY ELSE CHRISTENSEN


In first-century Palestine, one man towered above all others. With his message of equality, Jesus became a unifying figure for his people – and a thorn in the side of the Romans, in life and death. After almost 400 years of evangelising, martyrdom and power struggles, early Christians established the preacher from Nazareth as one of the most important individuals in history.

Jesus



The poor carpenter
who founded
a world religion

BRIDGEMAN & SHUTTERSTOCK



On Palm Sunday, Jesus and his disciples arrived in Jerusalem, where they were greeted by a large crowd that hailed Christ as the Jews' saviour.

MARY EVANS

In AD 30, Palestine seethed with discontent under Roman rule. Preachers sought to rally the population around God and rebellion, but Jesus of Nazareth, the disciple of the infamous firebrand John the Baptist, stood out. His passionate words commanded vast audiences, but the distrustful Roman authorities were watching him too...

Jesus: apprentice to an extremist



The Mount of Olives was a peaceful place. The view of Jerusalem's walls and towers was breathtaking, and at night, the clean air was filled with fragrance. But the beauty and peace were lost on Jesus. A dark, cold feeling of dread gripped his heart, and as he walked along the winding, stone paths, his fear grew. Even the presence of three of his closest friends couldn't stave off the loneliness that crept up on him.

"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me," he whispered before walking on a little further to make one last desperate plea to God, to spare him what he knew was about to happen. The thought of his slow death on the cross was almost unbearable. Upon his return, he found his friends dozing. Dawn was approaching.

Beyond the Garden of Gethsemane, Jerusalem was tense. The city was celebrating the Jewish festival of Passover, the streets teeming with pilgrims from near and far. The Romans, who controlled Palestine, were on the alert for any signs of trouble and were keeping a particularly close eye on Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, who had recently come to the authorities' attention. His sermons were attracting huge crowds, and more and more of his followers were claiming that their god had chosen him to liberate Palestine. The Romans didn't like that kind of talk.

Jesus knew his days were numbered. A year earlier, he had been wandering through the countryside with a small group of followers – fishermen and other lowly figures; now he was considered a threat to mighty Rome. He knew his punishment would be crucifixion, an agonising death sentence. In the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, he tried to come to terms with his inevitable fate.

Jesus is mentioned in historical sources

According to the Bible, Jesus's life couldn't have ended any other way. Everything pointed to this special, divine destiny. The New Testament gospels tell us that angels appeared when the baby Jesus was born and that kings honoured him with rich gifts. Later, at the age of 12, Jesus disappeared while visiting Jerusalem with his parents. He was found days later discussing the holy scriptures in the temple courts.

Historians have found no evidence for any of these events, but there is little doubt that Jesus lived. In addition to the Bible, he is mentioned by both a Roman and a first-century Jewish source. The Jewish historian, Josephus, described a teacher and miracle worker named Jesus, while the Roman Tacitus talked about

"Christus" who "suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus". From the historical events mentioned in the Gospels, historians also know roughly when Jesus was born, but beyond that, they can say nothing about his birth and childhood.

Scholars think that Jesus was most likely born in Nazareth, where his parents lived. Although the gospels of Luke and Matthew claim that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, where his parents had travelled for a census because they were "of the house and lineage of David," historians are sceptical of this claim. A census did take place around the time of Jesus's birth, but it was localised and did not apply to the area of Galilee where Nazareth was located. Furthermore, historians reject the idea that Jews would be required to travel to a distant city where their ancestors had lived generations earlier. The Romans conducted censuses to levy taxes, meaning only the residents' current whereabouts was of interest.

Jews were brutally repressed

The assertion that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the birthplace of King David, likely stemmed from evangelists seeking to link Jesus with the legendary monarch. According to tradition, around a thousand years before the birth of Christ, King David had united the region's 12 tribes to forge a powerful kingdom. Under King David, Israel was strong and prosperous, and its inhabitants content. In Jesus's day, an individual's reputation was closely tied to their ancestry. By portraying Jesus as King David's descendent, Christ's advocates bestowed upon the Son of God a lineage of unparalleled prestige.

In reality, Jesus had only a distant connection to David. However, like most Jews at the time, he probably revered Israel's famous king, who symbolised liberation for the Jewish people. Half a millennium after David's passing, his once-unified kingdom had succumbed to internal strife as powerful figures scrambled to claim different regions of the fertile land.

By Jesus's time, Palestine was under Roman

There is little doubt that Jesus lived. In addition to the Bible, he is mentioned by both a Roman and a first-century Jewish source.

control. The Romans had entered the country around 60 years earlier and now exerted a firm grip over the region. In the southern territory, a Roman prefect governed, forming alliances ►

Biblical archaeology



The entrance to the family tomb was in the East Talpiot in Jerusalem.

Christ's family tomb

In 1980, construction workers found a tomb while laying the foundation for a housing complex outside Jerusalem. The tomb was dated to 538 BC–AD 70 and contained several coffins bearing the names of "Jesus, son of Joseph", "Joseph" and "Mary".

In a controversial 2007 documentary, journalist Simcha Jacobovici and filmmaker James Cameron claimed that the tomb belonged to Jesus and his family.

However, most scholars reject this theory. Names like Jesus, Joseph and Mary were common at the time, and Jesus's family was too poor to build a family tomb.

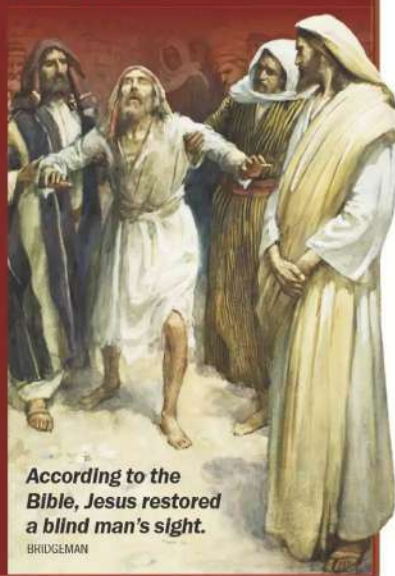
Miracles were part of everyday life in Palestine

Jesus was known for healing the sick and performing miracles – but perhaps his patients weren't as sick as the Bible claims.

In addition to preaching, Jesus also had a reputation for healing the sick, casting out evil spirits, and even raising people from the dead. In the Bible, these miracles are presented as proof that he was specially chosen by God. In reality, the belief that both illness and healing were due to divine intervention was common in Palestine at the time.

Miracle workers were not an uncommon sight in Palestine either. Equipped with incantations written on papyrus or carved into clay bowls and amulets, they treated the sick. Even professional doctors, trained in the methods developed by Hippocrates – the Greek ancestor of medicine – used incantations. Some historians have pointed out that many of the illnesses Jesus cured – such as speech impediments, bleeding disorders, and seizures – may have been psychological or temporary. The US religious historian EP Sanders points out that in at least one instance, Jesus implied that a little girl whom he

had apparently raised from the dead had merely been sleeping (Mark 5:39). However, the researchers emphasise that as modern scientists, they cannot judge something as unscientific as miracles. What they can determine, however, is that both Jesus and his followers believed in the miracles and experienced them as real.



According to the Bible, Jesus restored a blind man's sight.

BRIDGEMAN

with influential Jewish factions, including the leaders of wealthy families and religious houses. This arrangement helped keep the peace and granted those at the apex of Jewish society a degree of control. Conversely, the northern part, Jesus's birthplace, was under the rule of a

The mere mention of the word Roman instilled a sense of fear and ... Calls for a new King David to expel the Romans and restore Jewish freedom increased.

local leader who, in essence, served as a proxy for Roman interests. This setup left the vast majority of the populace – the 85-95 per cent

who lacked economic or religious authority – voiceless, including Jesus's own family, who were neither affluent nor influential.

The Jews were forced to pay heavy taxes to the land's imperial overlords, and the Romans frequently seized grain, animals and essential supplies whenever it suited them. They also requisitioned horses and chariots for transportation. Instances of theft of personal possessions and the rape of Jewish women were also common. There were also religious transgressions, including Roman soldiers parading adorned standards through the streets, in direct violation of the Jewish prohibition concerning the veneration of such images.

Along Palestine's borders, 25,000 legionnaires were poised to suppress any uprising. The Jewish populace, stung by its lack of sovereignty, felt the weight of Roman dominance. The mere mention of the word Roman instilled a sense of fear and humiliation, fuelling resentment. Calls for a new King David to expel the Romans and restore Jewish freedom increased.

God wanted to help his people

There are almost no reliable sources about Jesus's life before he reached his late 20s, so historians have no way of knowing what he thought about the Romans. However, Palestine at the time was buzzing with religious movements advocating great reforms. According to Jewish tradition, God would always offer his people divine aid as long as they were faithful to him. In this way, resistance to Roman rule became intrinsically linked with religious duty. The intertwining of insurrection and religion was further bound up by a prophecy in Genesis 3:15 that claimed a man would come to crush the serpent's head and restore freedom and prosperity to the Jews. Many believed this verse heralded the arrival of a new, strong king. Throughout Palestine, preachers each proclaimed the imminent arrival of the Messiah and the Jews' subsequent salvation. The messages were enticing, and many were attracted to the often charismatic figures at the forefront of the religious movements. Even Jesus was beguiled. In his late 20s, he began following a man known as John the Baptist, who was evangelising in rural Palestine.

By today's standards, Jesus's teacher and inspiration was an extremist. He was strictly ascetic in his clothing – wearing camel-hair garments held together by a leather belt around his waist – and his food consisted of "locusts and wild honey", according to the gospels.



Herod's tomb is located at the fortress of Herodium outside Jerusalem.

Herod's mausoleum

"And the body was carried two hundred furlongs (40 km), to Herodium." This is how Josephus described the funeral of King Herod, who, the Bible claims, murdered all male infants after the birth of Jesus.

It wasn't until 2007 that archaeologists located the tomb a few kilometres from Jerusalem. It contained a richly decorated sarcophagus, but no remains. The sarcophagus had been smashed – probably during a Jewish riot in AD 66.

John's sermons to Jesus and his other followers revealed him as an uncompromising revivalist preacher. The kingdom of God was at hand, John claimed. He rejected unworthy followers, calling them a "generation of vipers" who could return when they had repented of their sins. He made strict demands for solidarity among his followers, saying, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." (Luke 3:11). John made no secret of the fact that those who did not stay on the right path would suffer. Prepare yourselves for the wrath to come, John thundered, for "every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

Jesus's career lasted only one year

According to the gospels, Jesus was baptised by John. Jews had always washed before visiting the temple, but John invented baptism as a transition to a new and more godly life, immersing his followers in the Jordan River.

Soon after, Jesus himself began preaching around Galilee. Like many other revivalist preachers of the time, he travelled from town to town, speaking in local synagogues where people met for meals and debates.

Scholars don't know what Jesus looked or sounded like, other than that his native language was Aramaic. However, his strong charisma and oratorical skills soon earned him a small band of disciples who followed him around the country. According to the Bible, the disciples left their previous lives, families

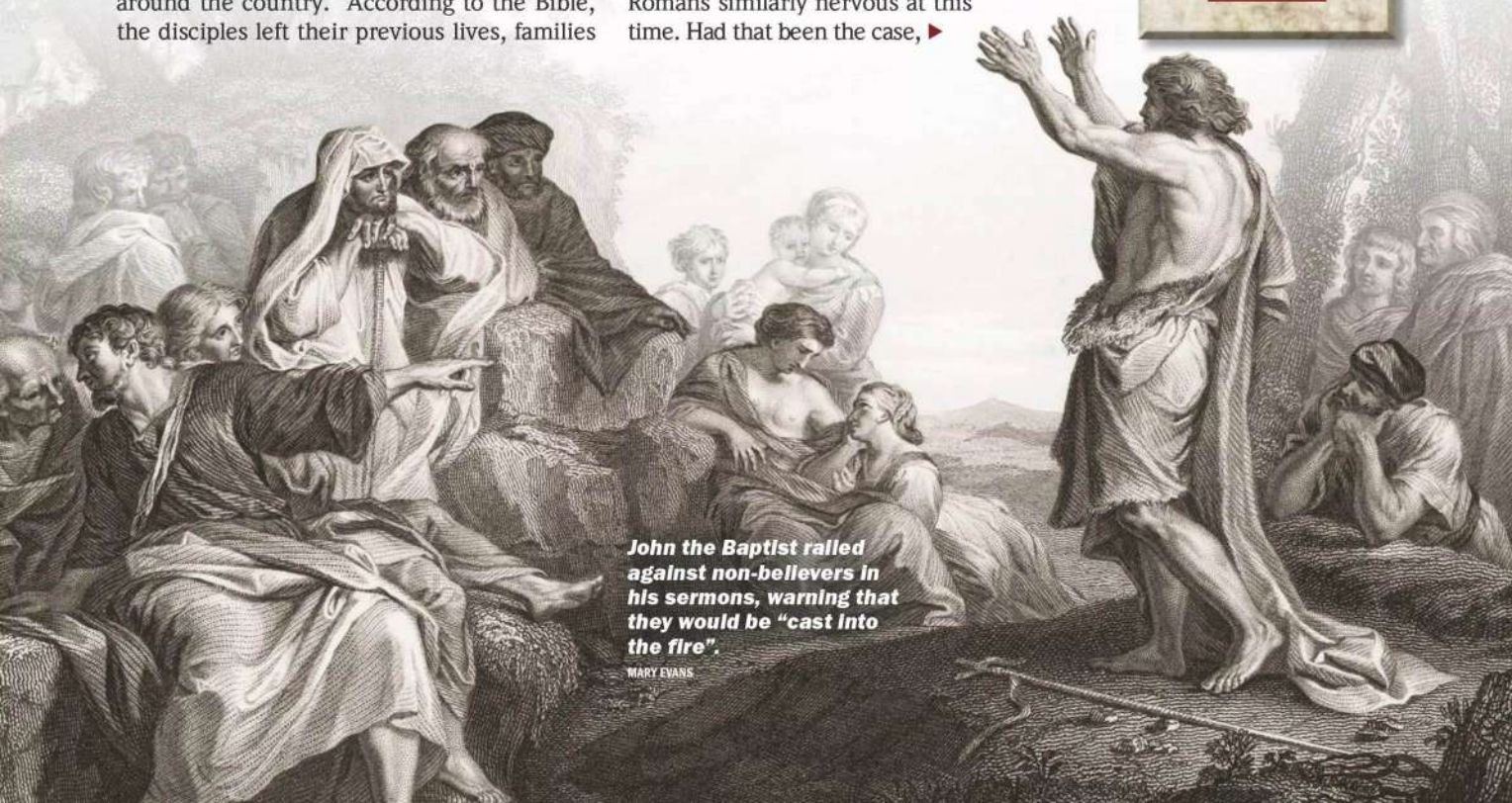
and professions to follow Jesus after a single encounter. However, historians believe that Jesus had already earned a certain reputation by the time he met his first disciples, the fishermen Simon and Andrew, who let go of their nets by the Sea of Galilee to become "fishers of men" with the former carpenter.

No one knows exactly how long Jesus spent preaching during this period, but historians guess that it was no more than a year. All indications are that the movement didn't have time to get organised. Jesus and his disciples managed from day to day, sleeping wherever they could find shelter and eating with anyone who offered them a meal. Scholars believe that if Jesus had been on the road for more than a year, his life would have been less chaotic. Also, neither he nor his disciples, who were all lowly workers, would have been able to survive much longer without income.

Criticism of the Romans was mild

Shortly after Jesus's baptism, John was arrested by the Romans and executed. According to the gospels, John had accused the local prince of immorality. However, as the historian Josephus points out, it is more likely that John was killed because his sharp opinions and eloquence threatened the Romans. The country's occupiers knew that religion could be a political powder keg, and John's promises of a kingdom of God could easily be interpreted as a call for rebellion.

There is no indication that Jesus made the Romans similarly nervous at this time. Had that been the case, ►



John the Baptist rallied against non-believers in his sermons, warning that they would be "cast into the fire".

MARY EVANS



Jesus walked Galilee's roads for around a year, his following growing all the time.

BRIDGEMAN

they could have easily stopped him. Jesus's message was similar to John's: the kingdom of God was at hand, and the time had come to repent and follow his commandments. And like John, Jesus also had a strong social message: in the kingdom of God, all men were equal and the same principles should apply here on earth. The best way to serve God, he said, was to help the weakest in society.

Christ also challenged the established order in other ways. According to the Gospel of Mark, when his family tried to restrain him because they thought he was "beside himself"

He enjoyed celebrating with good food and wine – to the extent that his opponents tried to label him as immoral.

– suffering from some kind of mental illness – he disowned them. He refused to let them in and called his disciples his true family. This was neither an easy nor popular gesture in a society

that strictly adhered to the commandment of honouring one's parents.

In other respects, Jesus was more relaxed than other preachers. He enjoyed celebrating with good food and wine – to the extent that his opponents tried to label him as immoral.

According to Matthew 11:18-19, Christ, seemingly tired of the criticism and being compared to the ascetic John the Baptist, said, "For John [the Baptist] came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He hath a devil'. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.'"

He was more circumspect about political matters, although he did subtly criticise the Romans. For example, the difference between the kingdoms of earth and heaven was a common theme in his sermons. The earthly realm – which for a Jew at the time was synonymous with the Roman Empire – was evil, unjust and superficial, while heaven was the exact opposite.

An example of his indirect criticism of the Romans can be found in the Gospel of Mark, where Christ exorcises a collection of evil spirits, transferring them into a group of pigs who subsequently charge off a cliff and drown. According to the story, when Christ asks the possessed man his name, he replies: "My name is Legion: for we are many." According to biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan, who has made an in-depth study of the historical Jesus, the story can be read as an anti-Roman parable, with Legion being an obvious reference to the Roman legions of the time. Viewed in this context, the story, which ends with the pigs – an unclean animal – drowning in the sea, becomes a strong condemnation of the occupying power.

Jesus's response to a question about whether Jews should pay taxes to the Romans contains a similarly couched message: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." It's an ambiguous answer – for what can belong to the emperor that does not belong to God?

Pharisees were the Christians' rivals

However, Jesus refrained from directly criticising Rome, and there is no evidence that his allusions to the kingdom of God were a direct call for rebellion. The political and social change referred to in Christ's sermons was the result of divine intervention rather than human insurrection. Furthermore, Jesus was always welcoming to



Police found engraving equipment at the antique dealer's premises.

Jacob's fake coffin

In 2002, the press reported that an Israeli antiques dealer had found a coffin with the inscription "Jacob, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus."

If genuine, it would be one of the few first-century relics with a real connection to the Gospels. But the find turned out to be a fake; the chest was genuine, but the antique dealer had forged the inscription and the coffin's outer layers.

individual Romans and instructed his followers to love everyone, even their enemies. Jesus ate with tax collectors, the Roman Empire's despised representatives and willingly assisted a Roman soldier who asked for help for his sick servant (Matthew 8:5-10).

Jesus flatly rejected political ambitions with the words: "The Son of Man came not to be ministered to, but to minister". If the Jews had hoped for – and the Romans feared – a messiah with a flaming sword in hand, Jesus shattered the expectations of both groups.

Historians believe that Jesus considered himself a devout Jew. He held fast to the Ten Commandments, which according to Jewish belief were handed down from God to mankind, and observed the edict to purify himself before Passover feasts, sacrifices and the like. According to biblical scholar EP Sanders and others, the Bible's many accounts of other Jews condemning Jesus for taking the precepts lightly are simply untrue.

Many of the stories refer to Jewish leaders – especially the scribes – criticising Jesus for not keeping the commandments. For example, one of the gospels claims that the Pharisees – a group of Jews whom the evangelists had labelled as hypocrites – wanted to kill Jesus because he healed a man with a withered hand on a Sabbath, the Jewish holy day. However, historians point out that the regulations only prohibited Jews from working on a Sabbath and

that Jesus's healing someone – which is accomplished by asking the man to stretch out his hand – can hardly be considered labour.

EP Sanders believes that the evangelists distorted the stories. Jesus probably had lively discussions with other Jews, but the disagreements remained within the bounds of what most observant Jews could accept. According to religious scholar Catherine D Murphy, the Pharisees were far more tolerant than the evangelists suggest, while the 'scribes' were a mixed group of theologians, village scribes and court clerks, who can hardly be attributed any overall power and influence.

The evangelists' attempt to turn the Jews into enemies of Jesus, who would prevent him from spreading the true teachings, is – according to EP Sanders – due to the fact that the Jews were the Christians' toughest theological competitors during the period in which the gospels were written.

Jesus was received as a saviour

Throughout the year that Jesus walked and preached, his following grew steadily. Among the countless preachers promising God's salvation and deliverance from bondage, Jesus had quickly emerged as a charismatic loner. His message of God's boundless love and forgiveness appealed to almost everyone, and Jesus's eloquence made many prefer to listen to his heartfelt ►

Jesus was popular with rich women

A significant portion of Jesus's entourage consisted of wealthy women who provided lodging and paid for his travels.

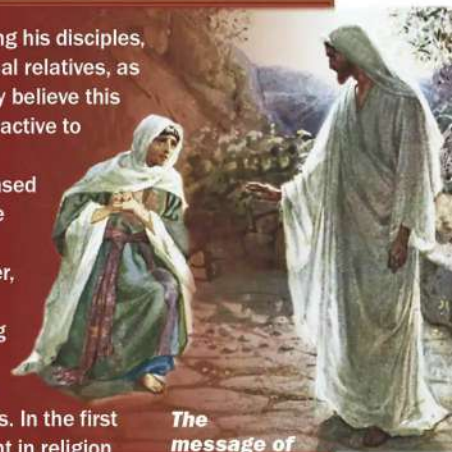
From the beginning of his time as a preacher, Jesus attracted many women – especially from the higher social classes. Luke noted "Mary called Magdalene ... And Joanna the wife of ... Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance."

According to scholars, this wording suggests that many of the women who followed Jesus helped fund his itinerant preaching. It is likely that the women did not walk with Jesus themselves but paid his

and his disciples' expenses and provided food and lodging.

According to US religious historian Bart D Ehrman, the reason Jesus attracted so many women was because of his message of equality and justice for all. Jesus's teaching that the weak should inherit the kingdom of God appealed to women, who had limited opportunities to develop independently in the first century. Several scholars also point out that Jesus criticised the traditional family structure – for

example, by claiming his disciples, and not his biological relatives, as his true family. They believe this may have been attractive to women, who were generally judged based on their place in the family and not as individuals. However, women from the upper classes being active in religious life was not unique to followers of Jesus. In the first century, involvement in religion was an acceptable occupation for wealthy women, and several other movements of the period also had female benefactors. For example, a plaque discovered on a synagogue in Asia Minor revealed that a high proportion of the founding donors were women.



The message of justice for all appealed to the rich women who sponsored Jesus.

BRIDGEMAN

Evangelists targeted their propaganda

The Gospels are scholars' best source for the life of Jesus, but they are filled with embellishments and exaggerations.

Scholars face a scarcity of sources when researching the historical figure of Jesus, and those they do have are fraught with pitfalls. Only two near-contemporary historians – Josephus (c. 37-100) and Tacitus (c. 56-120) – make any mention of Jesus. The remainder of the academics' insights are drawn from the four gospels of the New Testament. Despite the evangelical purpose of these texts, they do describe the life of Jesus in some detail, and offer a rich picture of the period.

The composition of the Gospels dates back to around AD 70-100,

when early Christians endeavoured to compile the myriad stories surrounding Jesus into a cohesive narrative. Although attributed to individuals close to Jesus, doubts linger over whether they penned the texts themselves.

The gospel of Mark's was the earliest text, and hence garners the greatest trust among historians. While Mark also carries biases, it presents a relatively unadorned account of Jesus's life, lacking the embellishments found in other gospels. For instance, Mark straightforwardly depicts Jesus as one among many followers of John the Baptist,

whereas other accounts suggest a special relationship between Jesus and John.

The gospels of Luke and Matthew emerged next. They covered some of the same events, but modifications were made to align the narratives with the portrayal of Jesus as God's chosen one. Additionally, these gospels were tailored to appeal to distinct audiences. Matthew, aiming to convert Jews, frequently cited Old Testament prophecies, whereas Luke, targeting the lower classes, emphasised Jesus's role as a protector of the poor.



Josephus was one of the few historians close to the time to describe Jesus.

MARY EVANS

Calendar mix up misses Jesus's birthday

In 527, Dionysius Exiguus calculated that Jesus was born 754 years after Rome was founded. This info seems to be based, at least in part, on the gospel of Luke. Unfortunately, Dionysius overlooked the fact that both Luke and Matthew place Jesus's birth in Herod's reign, which ended in 4 BC. This would mean that Jesus must have been born by that year at the latest – four years before his own official birth date and the start of the AD calendar.



The Bible claims Pilate tried to get Jesus released, but the Jews wouldn't budge: Jesus had to die.

descriptions of the kingdom of God rather than the more abstract interpretations of scripture offered by traditional scholars. Jesus's words gave hope to many who dreamed of a saviour who could deliver them from Roman oppression. Thousands turned out to hear him.

Although several other disciples of John the Baptist also began preaching, none achieved a popularity that even remotely matched that enjoyed by Jesus. When Jesus showed up for the Passover feast in Jerusalem, the tense

situation came to a head. Many of the pilgrims in the city had heard about him, and the Romans were growing nervous. According to the gospel of Matthew, the Romans had good reason to fear him, because Jesus was greeted by a "very great multitude [who] spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes ... cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David". The combination of a large crowd and the name David must have made the Romans nervous.

Realising that the Romans couldn't tolerate his activities for much longer, Jesus gathered his disciples for a final meal. He then went to the Mount of Olives to find inner peace and reconcile himself to his destiny. As he wandered in despair, a group of sombre-looking men arrived and surrounded him.

Pilate executed Jesus without a care

According to the gospel of Matthew, a "great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people" came and led Jesus away. One of Jesus's own disciples, Judas Iscariot, had shown the envoys who to apprehend. Scholars suspect that the allegations about Judas are true, because the evangelists had no immediate



The limestone inscription is the only archaeological reference to Pontius Pilate.

Pilate's memorial

In 1961, during the excavation of a theatre from King Herod's time in Caesarea Maritima city, archaeologists discovered a 82 cm x 65 cm stone slab.

The stone carried an inscription that appears to read: "To the Divine Augusti [this] Tiberieum Pontius Pilate prefect of Judea has dedicated [this]", suggesting that it was laid as part of a temple dedicated to the Emperor Tiberius.

Caesarea Maritima, located on the Mediterranean coast between the present-day cities of Tel Aviv and Haifa, was the ruling city of Judea in Pilate's time, and scholars are convinced that the inscription is genuine.

reason to invent such an embarrassing story of a betrayal within their own ranks.

Judas's motives are difficult to assess. Some theories claim he was disappointed that Jesus wasn't fighting the Romans more directly and wanted to provoke a confrontation. Others believe Judas acted out of simple greed – turning in his teacher for 30 pieces of silver.

The gospels claim the Jewish leaders persuaded the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate to execute Jesus. Fuelled by anger that Jesus had exposed their hypocrisy, they accused him of blasphemy. A crowd of ordinary Jews supported the leaders, and no matter how hard Pilate tried, they wouldn't let Jesus go. Frustrated, Pilate washed his hands, signalling his desire to distance himself from the judgement of Jesus.

This account does not fit scholars' understanding of power relations in Roman-occupied Palestine. The Romans may have wanted to be on good terms with the Jewish elite, but they were the ultimate authority. The Jews' role in Jesus's death is therefore likely to have been extremely limited and mostly reflects the local aristocracy's attempt to adapt to the realities of Palestine around the year 30. A Jewish revolt would have affected them all, so in an attempt to appease the Romans, they agreed to have Jesus arrested.

This version is also confirmed by a Jewish high priest in the gospel of John. Shortly before Jesus went to Jerusalem, the high priest met with leading Jews and discussed the danger of Jesus having so many followers. "It is expedient for us, that one man should die ... [and] the whole nation perish not," he remarked. They opted to side with the Romans to keep the peace and their positions. Thus, it's quite likely that a group of Jews apprehended Jesus.

The image of Pontius Pilate as a kind-hearted and slightly insecure official doesn't match other sources either. Pilate was known as a

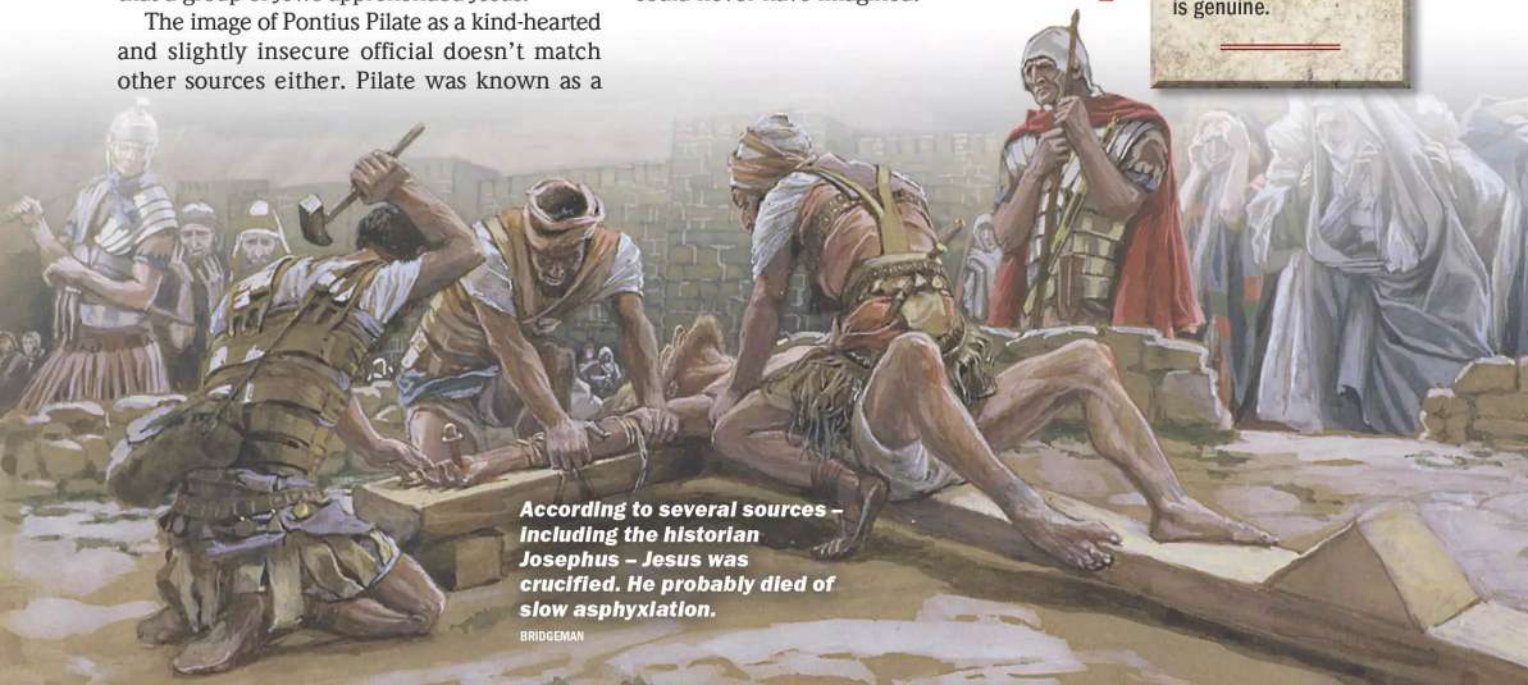
ruthless prefect who had people executed without trial. For example, a few years after Jesus's death, he had a group of pilgrims murdered – an act that got him fired as prefect. The reason the gospels paint such a mild picture of Pilate – and of the Romans' role in Jesus's death in general – is that the Christians in the first century AD needed to be on good terms with the Romans, while the Jews' role as a power brokers in Palestine was largely over.

Jesus died in despair

Details of the crucifixion are unknown to historians, but the standard procedure was to nail the condemned man's hands and feet to the cross so that he hung by the shoulders. The position puts so much pressure on the ribs and diaphragm that after a while, the condemned person suffocates. This form of death was considered humiliating and was usually reserved for outcasts, such as slaves, rebels and common thieves. Scholars believe that Jesus was probably sentenced for damaging Rome's reputation – a political judgement – if the governor bothered to refer to a legal pretext at all.

Crucifixion could last several days, but Jesus died after a few hours. According to the gospels, he exclaimed: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Some historians believe the phrase is a later addition. Others see it as proof that Jesus didn't expect to die on the cross.

Whether Jesus's fate was predetermined or he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time, the crucifixion changed the course of history. The Roman Empire had crushed Jesus the man. In return, they paved the way for a religious movement that wielded a power they could never have imagined.



According to several sources – including the historian Josephus – Jesus was crucified. He probably died of slow asphyxiation.

BRIDGEMAN

Disciples gave Jesus eternal life

According to the Bible, Jesus chose 12 men to reign with him in the Kingdom of God. After the Resurrection, he told them to go out and "teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". Scholars believe that the number of apostles varied during the time Jesus preached, but have identified 12 individuals as the original apostles. Most paid dearly for their newfound Christian faith.

SCANPIX/AGG-IMAGES

This illustration is a modern rendition of Leonardo da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper"

JAMES THE YOUNGER played a major role as one of the leaders of the first Christian churches in **Jerusalem**, but as early sources often confuse him with Jesus' brother James, all info about James the Younger is very uncertain. According to one story, he was crucified in **Egypt**, where he was a missionary.

According to the Bible, **PETER** was the first person to see the resurrected Jesus. He helped found and lead the first church in **JERUSALEM** and travelled to the city of **ANTIOCH** in present-day Turkey and to **CORINTH** in Greece. According to tradition, Peter came to Rome, where he founded the city's Christian congregation. The Roman Catholic Church therefore considers him the first pope.

According to an ecclesiastical story dating back to the end of the first century, Peter was executed by Emperor Nero around the year 64. The legend states that Peter was crucified upside down because he did not feel worthy to be crucified in the same way as Jesus. In the Gospels, Jesus promised Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven, so he is often portrayed in art and popular culture as the gatekeeper of heaven.

JUDAS ISCARIOT was the disciple who betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Matthew the Evangelist reports that Judas repented and hanged himself. According to the book of Acts, Judas bought a field with the blood money, but never enjoyed his purchase because after "falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out."

JOHN was one of Jesus's confidants and played a central role in the early Church in Jerusalem. Scholars know little about his fate. One tradition claims he was martyred around AD 70. According to others, he passed away peacefully at the age of 100 in **Asia Minor**. If so, he was the only apostle to die of natural causes.

BARTHOLOMEW allegedly travelled to **Arabia**, **Ethiopia** and the area south-east of the **Black Sea**, where he suffered martyrdom by having his skin torn off. The church historian Eusebius (around AD 260-340) claimed Bartholomew went to **India**.

ANDREW was one of the first disciples to join Jesus. According to Greek sources, he evangelised in present-day **Romania**, **Russia** and **Georgia**, while Eusebius mentions that Andrew also preached in **Asia Minor**.

According to legend, Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross in **Greece**.



The ruins of Peter's house are today protected beneath a modern church.

Christ's headquarters

Archaeologists discovered a house in 1968 that they believe Jesus used as his headquarters. The house is located in the city of Capernaum, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and probably belonged to the apostle Peter.

The house served as an early church of sorts, and excavations have revealed a meeting hall with the names Jesus and Peter carved into the walls.

The apostles spread the word of Jesus

During the first century, followers of Jesus travelled to almost every corner of the Mediterranean, spreading the message of their teacher. The first Christian churches sprang up in the footsteps of the apostles.

BLACK SEA

THE PARTHIAN EMPIRE

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

EGYPT



THOMAS allegedly became a missionary in **Syria, Parthia** (around modern-day Iran) and **Asia Minor** (modern-day Turkey) before travelling to India. The Southern Indian Mar Thoma Church is claimed to have been founded by him, but scholars cannot confirm this. Thomas was martyred.

MATTHEW – also called Levi in some of the gospels – was a tax collector. The gospel of Matthew is attributed to him, but scholars think it unlikely he wrote it. According to tradition, Matthew evangelised in **Judea** (an area between Israel and the West Bank) and to the east in **the Parthian Empire**. Whether he died a natural death or was martyred is unknown.

JAMES THE ELDER

was one of the first disciples that Jesus associated with. According to Acts in the New Testament, he was martyred in AD 44 when the Jewish king Herod Agrippa had him executed.

PHILIP was present when John the Baptist baptised Jesus. After Jesus's death, he worked in **Palestine**, where he baptised a man from the court of an African queen. According to tradition, Philip was able to speak Greek and travelled to **Asia Minor** for missionary work. He was first crucified and then stoned to death.

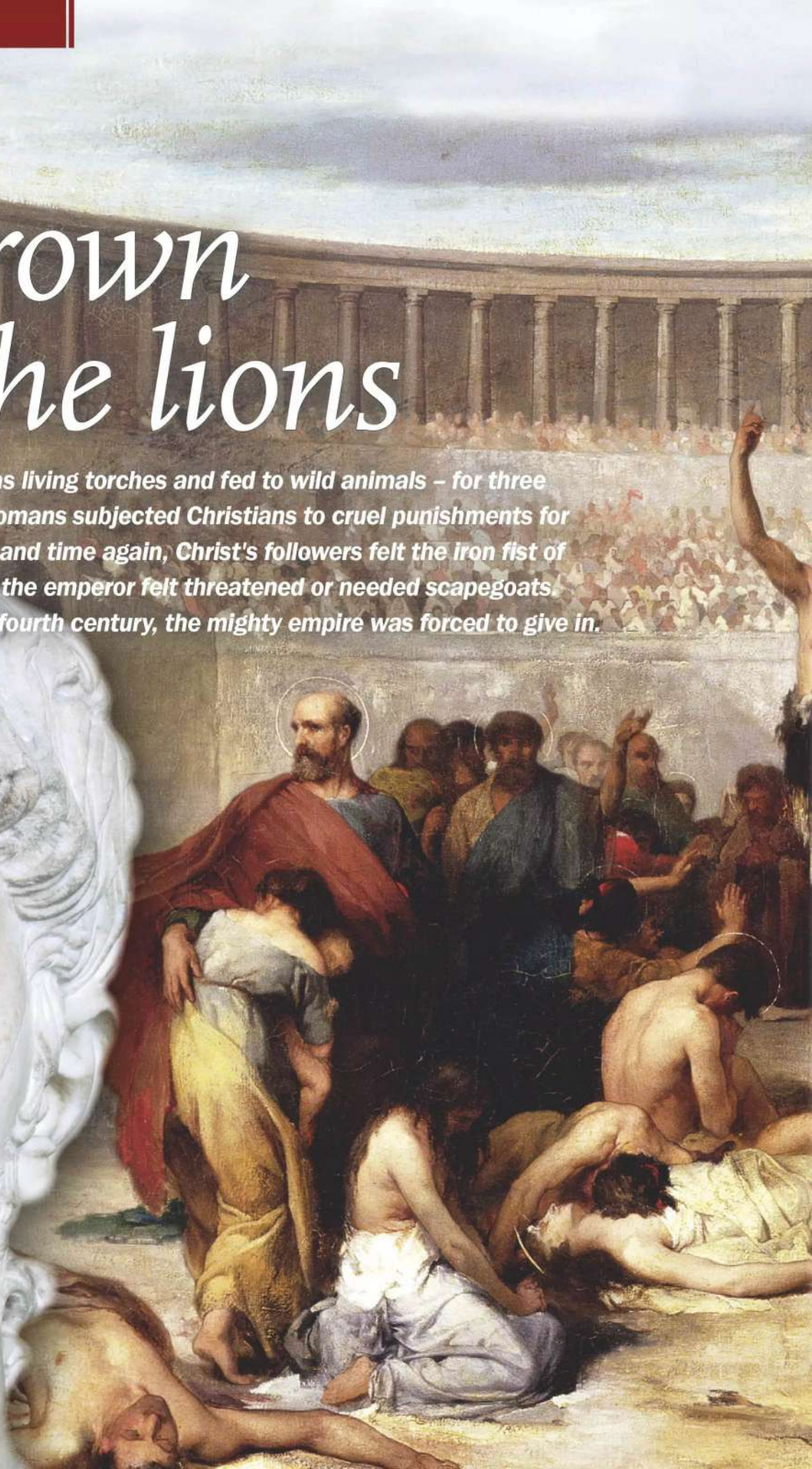
JUDAS THADDAEUS

travelled to **Palestine, Syria, Libya, Armenia** and **the Parthian Empire**, where he was martyred together with Simon. Judas Thaddaeus was allegedly executed with a club.

SIMON evangelised in **Egypt** and then joined Judas Thaddaeus. Together they preached in **Armenia** and **Parthia**, where Simon was killed by being sawn in half. According to another, more controversial account, Simon travelled to **England** where he was executed at Caistor in modern-day Lincolnshire.

Thrown to the lions

Crucified, used as living torches and fed to wild animals – for three centuries, the Romans subjected Christians to cruel punishments for their faith. Time and time again, Christ's followers felt the iron fist of Rome whenever the emperor felt threatened or needed scapegoats. But by the early fourth century, the mighty empire was forced to give in.





The newly discovered depiction has undergone extensive restoration.

Fresco of St Paul

The oldest depiction to date of the apostle Paul was discovered in June 2008 in one of Rome's many catacombs.

The image – a fourth century fresco – was discovered during the restoration of the Thekla catacomb near St Paul's Church. According to tradition, St Paul was buried in the church and the catacomb was probably used to venerate him.

Although the image was covered with dirt and chalk, experts are surprised at how well it has been preserved.

“Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.” The historian Tacitus recounts Emperor Nero's cruel treatment of the Christians in Rome in ghastly detail. The horrors he described unfolded after a fierce blaze ravaged sections of the city. Persistent rumours in the streets of Rome whispered that the emperor himself had started the inferno to clear space for his grandiose buildings.

Nero needed scapegoats to deflect attention from himself. The strange Christians, who'd recently appeared in Rome, were the perfect targets for the mob's anger, and so the emperor sanctioned a wave of torture and executions. These persecutions were just the start of a prolonged series. For the next three centuries, Christianity was relegated to a *religio illicita* [forbidden religion] in Rome.

When the first Romans were converted to Christianity in the mid first century AD, Rome already had an established Jewish minority.

The community was recognised by the emperor and Jews were exempt from worshipping Roman gods. With Christianity, it was a different story. While the Jews rarely tried to convert others, evangelising was a key part of the Christian religion.

For the emperor, the Christian mission posed a grave threat. Occupying a prominent position among Roman gods and even boasting his own cult, the emperor traditionally derived his authority from the gods and demanded reverence from his subjects. The emergence

of a new faith, which repudiated the ruler's divinity in favour of venerating a common criminal – whom the Romans had executed – incited abhorrence in Rome.

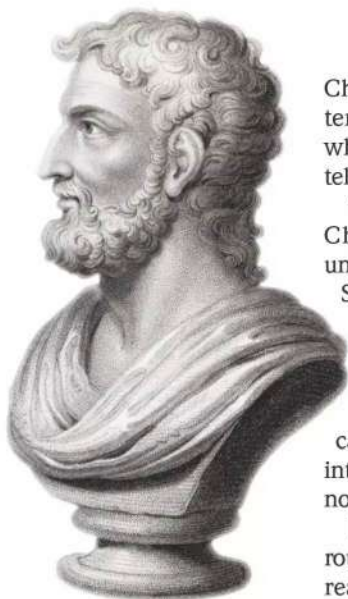
The strange Christians, who'd recently appeared in Rome, were perfect targets for the mob's anger.

Cannibalism and orgies

Contempt for the new faith also permeated Roman society. Christians were different. They kept to themselves, and they were bad for trade; merchants – who sold sacrificial meat and other religious necessities – blamed ▶

Nero began the persecution of Christians, and several of his successors followed suit, often executing Christians for sport.

POLFO/CORBIS & BRIDGEMAN



The historian Tacitus described how Christians were mistreated by Nero.

MARY EVANS

Christians for scaring Romans away from the temples. Others complained that slave girls who worked as fortune tellers would no longer tell fortunes once they became Christians.

The Romans also looked askance at the Christians' rituals, which seemed both unfamiliar and frightening. Stories of the Last Supper, where Christians allegedly 'ate human flesh' and 'drank blood', immediately sparked rumours of cannibalism. Similarly, the practice of Christians kissing when they met and calling each other 'sister' and 'brother' was interpreted as a sign of incest and a prelude to nocturnal orgies.

Nero skilfully exploited this prejudice and routinely had Christians arrested – not only for real or imagined crimes like the burning of Rome but also for their anti-social beliefs – or, as Tacitus puts it, their "hatred against mankind". The emperor, who did not hesitate to burn, behead or split the heads of his

opponents, employed persecution as a theatrical device to bolster his image as ruler.

"Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle ... while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer," Tacitus wrote.

In the glare of the burning human torches, the emperor received the homage of his subjects. The cheers of the crowd drowned out the screams of the dying Christians.

Christians were mistreated in the arena

Even after Nero's death, hatred for Christians smouldered. And time and time again, the embers were rekindled. During the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius from 161 to 180, the Roman Empire was under political, military and economic pressure. The Empire's northern border was constantly under attack, and famine, disease and floods swept across the empire.

After a plague struck the city of Lugdunum (modern-day Lyon) in 177, Christians were quickly blamed for the disaster. With the full support of the emperor, soldiers arrested many of the faithful and mutilated them in the city's great arena.

Often the Christians were sentenced to *damnatio ad bestia* [condemnation to beasts]

Stories of the Last Supper, where Christians 'ate human flesh' and 'drank blood', sparked rumours of cannibalism.

Christians were blamed for the Roman Empire's fall

According to British historians, the Roman Empire collapsed because its Christian citizens refused to integrate.

Within a century of Rome's conversion to Christianity, the mighty empire disintegrated. In his classic work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, historian Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) blames Christians for the fall of the empire.

Christians isolated themselves, refused to serve in the military and participated very sparingly in political life, writes Gibbon. Furthermore, the Christian faith threatened the Romans' unifying belief in their gods.

Although Christians only made up around five per cent of the population, they were highly visible and influenced all society. Their

churches excelled at amassing wealth, which made them powerful.

Gibbon claims these factors led to the collapse of the military, social and political structure of Rome.

Most historians agree that the growing power of the Church – along with weak Roman leaders – played a major role in the fall of Rome. However, later scholars have pointed out that Gibbon was writing during the Age of Enlightenment, when religion was seen as the enemy of reason. As a result, he drew sharp distinctions between Romans and Christians. However, as critics point out, the persecution of Christians shows that the Romans were not especially enlightened.



Romulus Augustulus, Rome's last emperor, was deposed by Germanic troops in 476.

Biblical archaeology



Crucified criminal

In 1968, archaeologists found a coffin containing the remains of a crucified man near Jerusalem. The bones date from AD 7-70 and confirm the Bible's description of crucifixions.

Studies have shown that the man was nailed to the cross through his feet and wrists. The common belief that Jesus was crucified through the palms of his hands is due to a misinterpretation of the Greek word for hand, *cheir*, which also includes the wrist.

and were thrown to wild animals. In the arenas, lions and tigers mauled Christian bodies and then devoured them in great heaps. The spectacle was a popular precursor to gladiatorial fights. After the plague epidemic in Lugdunum, however, the Christians topped the bill, and were mutilated in front of an enthusiastic crowd for an entire day.

Under torture, Christian slaves admitted to participating in incest, orgies and cannibalism while onlookers cheered. One by one, men and women, old and young, were whipped and subjected to cruel torments.

Church historian Eusebius, claimed a priest had red-hot brass plates pressed against his body, while a 90-year-old was beaten to death. Others were strapped to an iron chair suspended over flames and roasted alive. One slave girl, was left tied to a stake as ferocious animals were unleashed around her. When she somehow survived their attack, she was wrapped in a net and thrown to a raging bull. The bull tossed her around the arena with his horns while the spectators cheered and clapped. Finally, a merciful soul ended the woman's suffering with a dagger.

Desperate local Christians wrote to their fellow believers in Asia about the horrors:

"They threw those who had been strangled in the prison to the dogs, guarding carefully night and day that none should be buried by us. And then they threw out what was left by the wild animals and the fire, partly torn and partly charred, and, of the rest, the heads together with their trunks they also guarded ... And some raged ... seeking to take some more extravagant vengeance... others laughed and jeered ... [while] the more reasonable ... [asked]: "Where is their god and what did their religion profit them, which they preferred even to their own lives?"

Rebels had their tongues ripped out

Persecutions continued elsewhere in the Roman Empire. In 202, Emperor Septimius Severus ordered a ban on conversions, and in key cities like Rome, Carthage and Corinth, Christians were persecuted, tortured and executed mercilessly.

Religious leaders were exiled and ordinary Christians were forced to worship the Roman gods. Men, women and children were herded together in public squares and bodily forced to witness sacrifices. Sacrificial wine was sprinkled on all the goods in the market, so Christians had to choose between eating food ►

Fearing torture and murder, some Christians hid in Rome's catacombs, where they also buried their dead.

THE ART ARCHIVE



Christianity swept aside other religions

In the first century, Rome was a veritable smorgasbord of faiths, and undecided souls could find a religion for every taste. However, three factors gave Christianity a decisive edge.

■ THE GOSPELS

The Christian gospels were primarily intended as sales material, promoting Jesus as saviour. The authors therefore wrote and rewrote details of Jesus' life to make Christianity appeal to as wide an audience as possible. For example, the virgin birth appealed to the Romans whose traditional beliefs proclaimed that great people were born as a result of a meeting between a god and a virgin.



BRIDGEMAN

■ BAPTISM

Christians didn't discriminate based on rank, status or gender, but accepted anyone who declared their faith in God and Jesus – including women, who were banned from many other cults at the time. Christianity's only requirement was that converts be baptised. After baptism, anyone could go out and recruit new souls. In this way, the new faith quickly spread across the vast Roman Empire.



BRIDGEMAN

■ EYEWITNESSES

Most faiths in Rome worshipped gods from the world of mythology, such as the war god, Mithras, and the Egyptian goddess, Isis. However, many early Christians could say that they had known Jesus (from afar), or witnessed his miracles themselves. The eyewitness accounts of a contemporary divine figure made a far greater impression on the average Roman than stories of divine figures from the distant past.



Many early Christians claimed to have witnessed the greatness of Jesus themselves. This convinced many Romans.

BRIDGEMAN

consecrated to the Roman gods or starving. Those who resisted had their wealth confiscated, and were imprisoned or tortured.

Sacred Christian writings were ordered burned, churches demolished, and Christ's followers in the administration and military were stripped of their titles and rank. Those who were too outspoken had their tongues torn out or were burned alive.

Christians went underground

The persecutions only strengthened Christians' faith in Jesus. Many felt blessed to have the chance to proclaim their faith in Christ as they were martyred.

A popular story among believers concerned the Bishop of Smyrna who was condemned to the stake. In front of thousands of spectators, the ageing bishop accepted his sentence with his head held high, declaring, "You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and is then extinguished, but you know nothing of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly."

For a Roman governor in Asia, the Christians' death drive became too much when a large group was brought before him to be executed. He killed a few, but when the rest demanded to be killed too, he exclaimed: "You miserable wretches, if you want to die, you have cliffs to leap from and ropes to hang by."

Faith in Christ's message was so strong that not even a Roman ban on burials could stop the Christians. In the hardened volcanic ash under and around Rome, they painstakingly dug passageways and tunnels that stretched over 170 kilometres and were, in places, four levels high. Here, unlike the Romans who cremated their dead, the Christians buried their fallen



The cup was probably used by a fortune teller to predict the future.

Cup names Christ

A cup with the inscription "By Christ the Magician" was found in 2008 in the ancient harbour of the Egyptian city of Alexandria. The cup dates back to the first century and may be the first archaeological artefact to refer to Jesus as "Christ".

Some academics believe that the cup was used for divination – proving Christianity and pagan religions coexisted. Others are more critical, pointing out that "Christ" doesn't necessarily refer to Jesus.

martyrs in catacombs deep underground so they could be resurrected on Judgement Day.

Jesus had a head start

Despite the relentless persecution, Christianity spread rapidly in Rome. For individual Romans, the emperor-controlled gods left a spiritual void that needed to be filled. With its simple message and rules, Christianity had a huge advantage over its competitors.

Whereas Judaism required adherence to complex rules for everyday life, Christianity relied more on faith alone. And unlike mystery religions, such as the Isis and Mithras cults, which were often reserved for the upper classes and legionaries, Christianity didn't discriminate based on gender or class and there were no complicated initiation rituals.

The simple story of the carpenter, who on the cross secured eternal life for all, began to gain favour in the empire. Rome's poor and weak were especially fascinated by the new religion, which was so powerful that its followers were willing to be beaten and fed to wild animals rather than give it up. Congregations grew rapidly and with the help of the Roman road network, Christianity soon spread throughout the Mediterranean.

By the year 200, over 200,000 Christians lived within the Roman Empire's borders. A century later, that number had grown to more than six million. The emperor's executioners were buckling under the strain of mutilating, crucifying and otherwise torturing and massacring Christians.

Emperor fought under the cross

By the early fourth century, Jesus's teachings had won over so many followers – even among the upper echelons of the empire – that surrender to Christianity seemed inevitable.

The first major breakthrough came in 311. Emperor Galerius – a fierce opponent of Christians who had orchestrated several bloody persecutions – realised that the new faith could no longer be eradicated through violence. On his deathbed, the emperor issued a decree that allowed Christians to build churches and hold services. However, he stipulated that they were to "pray to their God for our safety, for that of the republic, and for their own".

In this way, Galerius hoped, Jesus could be enlisted in the service of the empire and take his place among the Roman gods.

However, Christianity's definitive breakthrough occurred a few years later, under Constantine the



Constantine was baptised after his great victory. He became Rome's first Christian emperor and became known as the liberator of the Christians.

Great. Among the contenders vying for the imperial throne, Constantine, like others, recognised the significance of garnering support from Christians to fulfil his aspirations.

His primary adversary, Maxentius, had recently gained influential allies by permitting Christians to select a new bishop in Rome. Constantine refused to be outdone. On the eve of a crucial battle against Maxentius, he claimed to have received a divine command during a dream to engage his rival under a Christian standard. Adhering to this vision, the emperor had crosses emblazoned on his army's shields. Contrary to all expectations, Constantine achieved a resounding victory, which he astutely proclaimed as a triumph for Christ.

The emperor's executioners were buckling under the strain of torturing, crucifying and otherwise tormenting Christians.

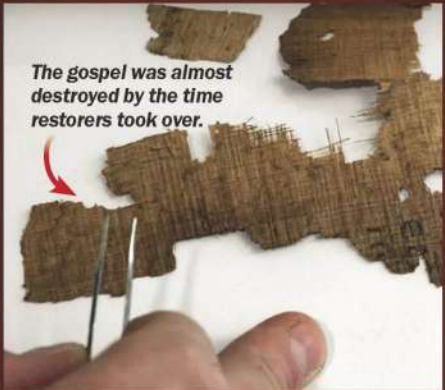
The Roman Empire and Christianity were now inextricably linked. Constantine followed up on Galerius' edict by introducing religious freedom in the Roman Empire and ordering an end to centuries of Christian persecution.

All confiscated churches were returned, priests were exempted from taxes, Christians were promoted to high administrative positions, and Constantine himself financed many new churches. At the same time, the emperor introduced Sunday as a public holiday and banned crucifixions. ■

JUDAS

– the unforgivable traitor

For almost 2,000 years, Christians have despised Judas Iscariot – the disciple who betrayed Jesus for a bag of silver. But even the most despicable scoundrel has his supporters. In the centuries following Christ's death, Judas's followers provoked Christians with murder and orgies.



The gospel was almost destroyed by the time restorers took over.

Villain or forgotten hero?

When the US magazine *National Geographic* published the Gospel of Judas in 2006, it caused a sensation. This rediscovered text from the third or fourth century AD made it possible to read a new account of the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion.

Some believed it was an anti-Bible, but the Church remained sceptical of the gospel.



Betrayed with a kiss. In 1660, painter Luca Giordano gave Judas red hair to emphasise his bad character.

RITZAU SCANPIX

BY ELSE CHRISTENSEN & TORSTEN WEPER

In the summer of 2019, three young men crept up to Danish footballer Jens Stage's apartment in the centre of Aarhus, Denmark. The men were all fervent fans of the city's football club AGF, which Stage had decided to leave.

Fuelled by indignation over Stage's move to FC Copenhagen, the men threw a stone through one of the apartment windows. Then came the next weapon – a smoke bomb. They also threw in a note with the message: "In Aarhus traitors are punished, you Judas bastard."

In the Christian world, there are few insults as damning as "Judas". For 2,000 years, the name has been synonymous with betrayal – exactly what the disciple Judas did when, according to the Bible, he sealed Christ's fate with a kiss in the Garden of Gethsemane.

But even the vilest traitor has supporters – as the story of Judas shows. In the early centuries of Christianity, he had his own followers and was even honoured in a text called the Gospel of Judas. It proclaims him to be the most

important of all Christ's disciples. Shortly before his martyrdom on the cross, Christ even supposedly said in a confidential conversation that Judas overshadowed all the other Apostles.

Disciples were carefully selected

Despite the frequent use of Judas's name as an insult, modern religious historians know very little about the New Testament's fallen disciple.

The name Iscariot is probably a reference to the fact that he came from Kerioth, a city in southern Judea.

How Judas ended up among the disciples is not recorded in the Bible, but Christ chose his followers carefully. The accounts show that Jesus knew divinely who to approach. In the same way, the chosen ones knew they should follow him.

The Bible recounts how Jesus met two brothers, Andrew and Simon (later called Simon Peter), who were fishing in the Sea of Galilee. He asked them to put down their nets.

"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," he said.

According to the evangelist Matthew (chapter 4, verses 19-20), the two brothers left their fishing and family to follow him.

Judas appears around 40 times in the Gospels, and like the other disciples, he followed the itinerant preacher Christ, who taught them all.

"And he ordained 12, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power

"You will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me."

Excerpt from the Gospel of Judas: Christ spoke to Judas about the impending betrayal that would make him the most important of the disciples.

to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils," Mark wrote (3:14-15).

Judas had fingers in till

At the time of Christ, the Jewish territories of Judea and Galilee were occupied by the Romans, who interfered little in the life of the province of Palestine beyond overburdening the inhabitants with taxes that drove entire families into bottomless debt.

Many young men who had been deprived of their prospects joined the preachers who travelled the country during that period. The men left their families and renounced their heritage; instead, the group became a familial community, in which they lived together and shared everything they had. Christ's small group also functioned in this way, and the role of treasurer fell to Judas.

The information about his special task is one of the very few details the Bible gives about Judas – and it is only used to describe his bad character. The disciple stole from the collection box.

John the Evangelist tells us that the week before the fateful Passover feast, around AD 30, Christ and his disciples



"I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood," Judas told the priests, but they didn't care.

FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHIC/GETTY IMAGES

were invited to a dinner in Bethany, now a suburb of Jerusalem. Before the meal, a woman anointed Christ's feet with fragrant oil. The act was a traditional sign of devotion, but the woman's use of the oil was wasteful, according to Judas, and he became agitated.

"[T]he house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot ... which should betray him, 'Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor?'" reported the most Judas-hostile disciple, John:

"This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and [kept some of] what was put therein," (John 12:3-6).

But petty theft was no longer enough for the greedy Judas.

A life for 30 pieces of silver

When Christ rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to celebrate *Pesach* (Passover), he deliberately engaged in a dispute with the city's Jewish high priests. The day after his arrival, Christ threw the stallholders and moneylenders out of the temple courtyard and warned the people against the scribes.

Judas knew that the temple's high priests were fed up with the religious troublemaker – and he saw a chance to make a tidy sum.

"And [Judas] went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray [Christ] unto them," (Luke 22:4).

The high priests counted out 30 pieces of silver – not a particularly large sum in ancient Jerusalem, but Judas was satisfied with the deal. "And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him," (Matthew 26:16).

The opportunity presented itself when Christ and his disciples ate together on Maundy Thursday.

"Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me," Christ declared, according to Matthew (26:21). As if to divert suspicion, Judas asked piously:

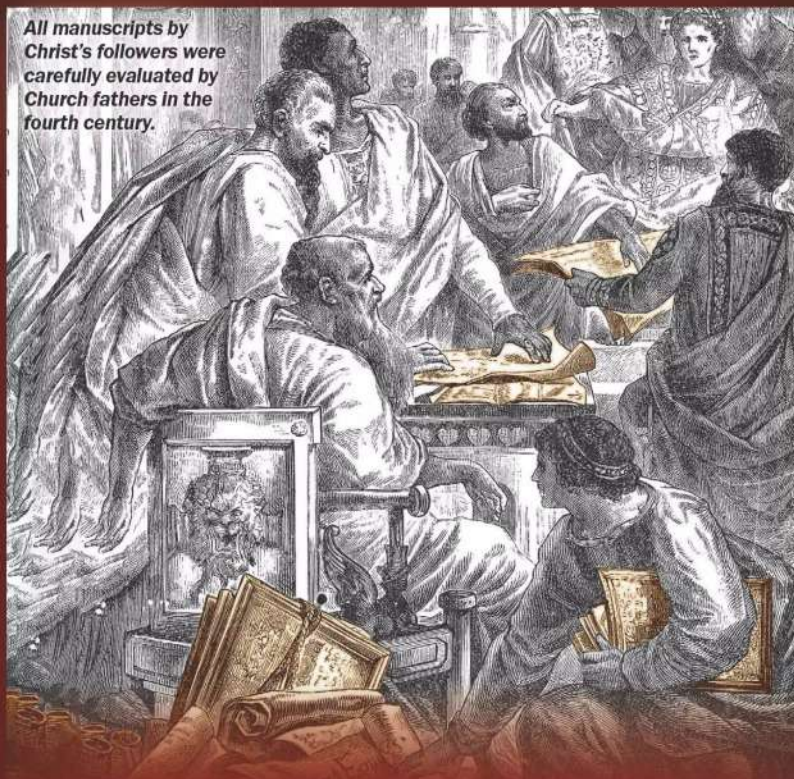
"Lord, is it I?"

Judas knew Christ would go to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, so he left the gathering early and went to meet the men who were to apprehend his leader.

As Christ prayed, the disciples repeatedly fell asleep. When he woke them the third time, it was with devastating news: "Lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand," (Mark 14:42).

Before Christ could finish his sentence, Judas stepped forward and greeted ►

All manuscripts by Christ's followers were carefully evaluated by Church fathers in the fourth century.



Church editorial meeting

The plethora of gospels forced the Orthodox Church fathers to take action. Of approximately 40 gospels, only four found favour in the New Testament.

After Christ's death, his followers spread a multitude of accounts of his life, so that by AD 180 there were at least 40 gospels in circulation. Some authors had shared fictitious stories written under the name of a recognised apostle.

To tidy up the texts, anti-heretic bishop Irenaeus identified four true gospels. He knew how things could go wrong if a faith

only followed one text, so he gave equal weight to the Gospels of Mark, Luke, Matthew and John.

This decision was supported by later Church fathers when they determined the content of the New Testament in the late fourth century. A total of 27 texts were included, while Gnostic texts were excluded.

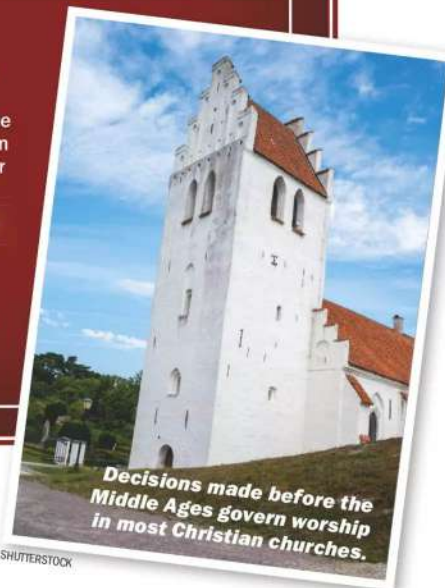
Several texts were discarded

The Gospel of James was about Christ's mother, Mary. Her parents were too old to have children, but then they were visited by an angel.

The Infancy Gospel told of Christ's childhood. He had no impulse control, and many died from his miracles. In the end, he resurrected everyone.

The Acts of Peter related the story of the Apostle Peter – including his battle against the Gnostic Simon the Magician and his later crucifixion in Rome.

The Gospel of Mary Magdalene portrayed her as Christ's closest disciple. It was said that he loved her more than the others.



Decisions made before the Middle Ages govern worship in most Christian churches.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Gospel of Judas was stored in chest freezer in Ohio

For more than 1,600 years, the gospel lay safely in an Egyptian cave. It wasn't until the papyrus was discovered that it began to decay.

Back in the 1970s, Egyptian farmers found the Gospel of Judas in a cave, but it would be three decades before conservators and scholars were finally allowed to work on the tattered papyrus sheets.

The farmers sold the gospel to an antiquities dealer in Cairo, Abdallah Arian, who tried for several years to resell it for three million dollars. He was unsuccessful, in both Egypt and Europe. Abdallah Arian flew to the US to meet potential new buyers, but to no avail.

In sheer frustration, he rented a vault at Citibank on Long Island, New York. Sixteen years went by as the papyrus languished in the vault. Finally, Arian received an offer from Swiss art dealer Frieda Nussberger-Tchacos, who was willing to pay \$200,000. Although the pages were in deplorable condition, she sold them in 2000 to papyrus dealer Bruce Ferrini in Ohio.

Ferrini's cheque for \$1.5 million bounced, but he refused to return the gospel. Instead, he hid it in his chest freezer, where the papyrus and ink suffered further damage. After a long tug of war, Nussberger-Tchacos finally got the gospel back so she could sell the remains of the manuscript to the Maecenas Foundation in Switzerland, which, along with *National Geographic*, arranged for the Coptic text to be preserved and translated.

● A 62-page book

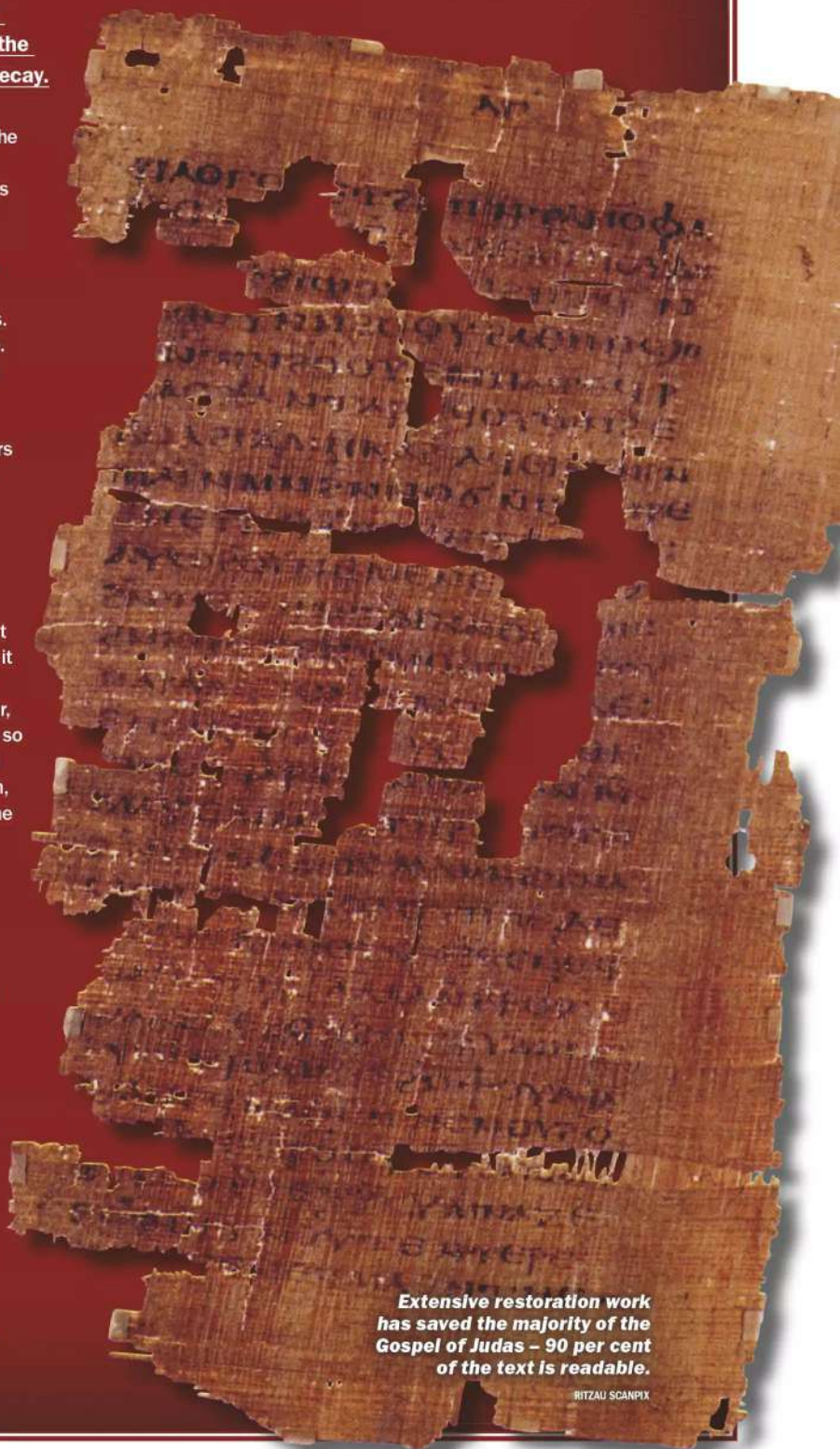
Originally, the Gospel of Judas consisted of 31 sheets of papyrus in a leather binding. Carbon-14 analysis showed that it was written some time between AD 220 and 340. The text is Coptic, but probably translated from Greek.

● Painstakingly restored

By the time the Gospel of Judas reached restorers, it looked like puff pastry, broken into more than 1,000 fragments. Each piece was preserved so the experts could assemble the pages like a giant jigsaw puzzle.

● A quick look at the gospel

The gospel refers to conversations between Christ and Judas, who, according to Christ, would be hated for ever for his betrayal. Finally, Christ made a prediction: the evil creator god and his inferior creatures would perish.



Extensive restoration work has saved the majority of the Gospel of Judas – 90 per cent of the text is readable.

RITZAU SCANPIX

him with a kiss. The loving gesture was an agreed sign – men armed with clubs and swords stepped out of the darkness. They dragged Christ to be interrogated first by the high priests and then by the Roman prefect in Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate, who sent him to his death.

Judas did not enjoy his 30 pieces of silver. While Christ died on the cross on Good Friday, Judas ended his life in shame. He regretted his act and returned to the temple to give the money back.

“I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood,” Judas wailed, but the priests replied: “What is that to us? See thou to that.”

In despair, Judas threw the money into the temple. The priests picked it up, but refused to put it in the temple treasury. It was blood money.

Judas couldn’t bear his guilt: “[He] departed, and went and hanged himself,” (Matthew 27).

Battle for the right doctrine

According to the New Testament, Christ was resurrected on the third day (Easter Sunday) and appeared to his disciples. The following 40 days were spent in religious teachings before the Son of God could ascend to heaven.

But there wasn’t enough time to establish a fully-fledged religion, and in the following decades a multitude of interpretations of Christ’s words and actions emerged. People who had met the Saviour – or just heard of him – offered their own take on Christian doctrine. Among them was Simon, nicknamed the Magician.

Around AD 60, he caused quite a stir with his miracles (or magic tricks) in the city of Samaria, north of Jerusalem. People were so impressed that they called him “the great power of God”.

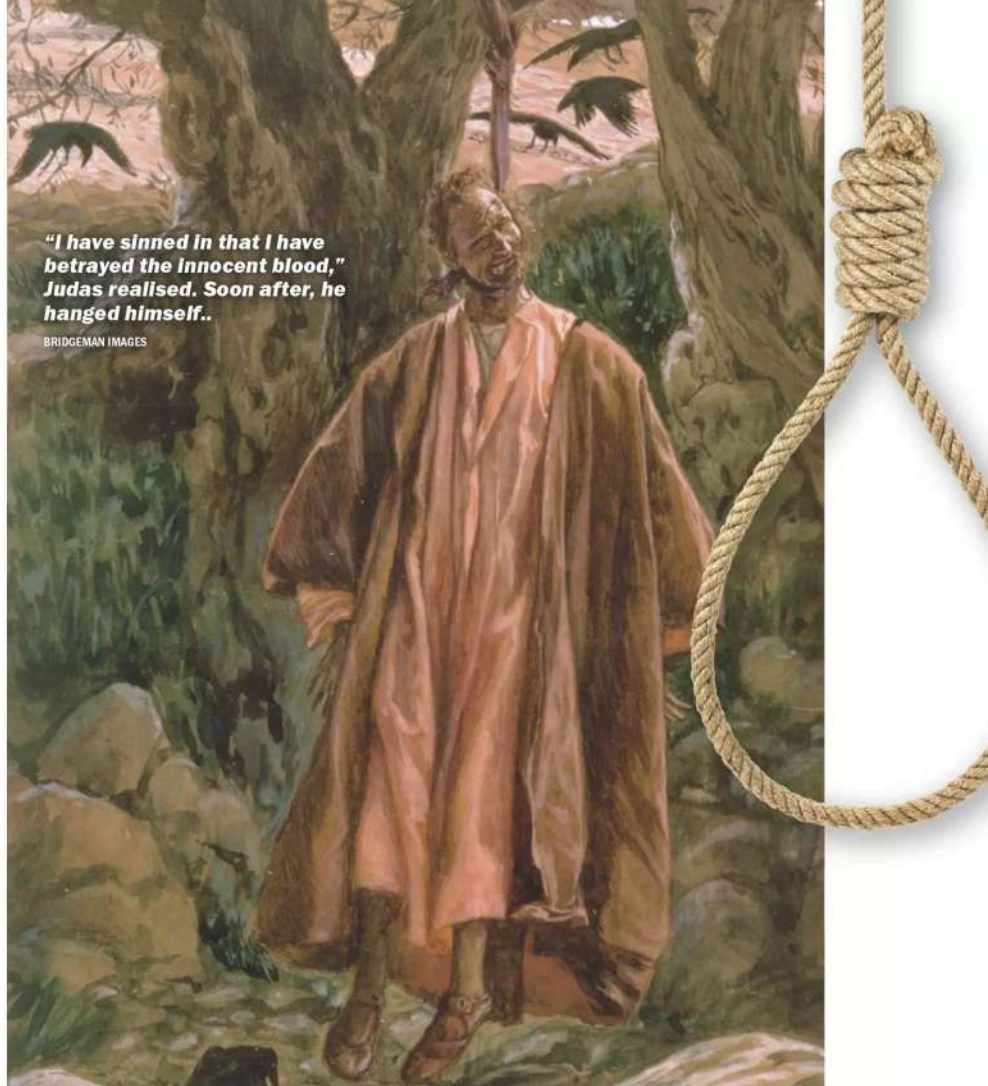
By this time, Christ’s disciples had baptised the first people in the city, but the Holy Spirit had not yet descended upon them. So, the disciples Peter and John went to lay hands on the baptised.

The ‘magician’ quickly realised that the disciples who could channel the Holy Spirit in this way possessed a trick far more spectacular than his, and he tried to buy their ability:

“Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.”

According to the Acts of the Apostles (8:18-21), the disciple Peter rejected him:

“Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast



“I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood,” Judas realised. Soon after, he hanged himself..

BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

*“They all said,
‘We have the strength.’
But their spirits did
not dare to stand
before [him], except for
Judas Iscariot.”*

Extract from the Gospel of Judas: Christ pointed out that the disciples believed in the wrong god.

neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.”

The words were more prophetic than Peter could have known, as Simon the Magician is recognised by modern religious historians as the first known Gnostic. The term is derived from Greek and means insight. With their special insight, the Gnostics had calculated that there must be two gods:

- The Old Testament God who had created the Earth. Because this god had made such a depraved world full of injustice, hunger and disease, he had to be evil, the Gnostics believed.
- The other, true God, had created the universe. The Gnostics aspired to

leave their earthly body to reach this exalted god.

Just as the disciples were successful in spreading their teachings in parts of Palestine, Turkey and Greece in the years after Christ’s death, the Gnostics also gained a growing number of followers. And some of them even used Judas in their faith.

Judas resurrected as Christ’s friend

The Gnostics’ mission was to fight the evil god and everything he had created. Among his creations were the Ten Commandments, which forbade the Jews from eating pork, committing murder and fornication.

In the logic of the Gnostics, the Ten Commandments were an arsenal of weapons they could use against the evil god – so the most fanatical members of the faith ate pork, killed people and indulged in orgies to reach the true God.

In the Tanakh (the Jewish version of the Old Testament), Gnostics found allies in the fight against the evil creator god, such as the serpent who tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, or Korah, ►

who tried to rebel against Moses when the Jews fled slavery in Egypt.

The treacherous Judas held a special place with the Gnostics, for he had helped Jesus leave his earthly body.

Many Gnostic sects found their way to the Egyptian harbour city of Alexandria, which supplied Rome with grain. Since the days of King Ptolemy (c. 280 BC), the city had housed a university and a gigantic library. As a result, Alexandria teemed with scholars who welcomed every new philosophical thought.

In Alexandria, the Gnostics found harmony while Christianity was falling apart; just over a hundred years had passed since Christ's death, and his followers seemed divided into a multitude of irreconcilable sects and factions, writing their own gospels

and fighting with each other. It became difficult to untangle the true words spoken by Christ from the fabrications.

At this time, the churches began to elect their first priests and bishops, one of whom took on the task of saving the true teachings. Irenaeus, bishop of the Roman city of Lugdunum (now Lyon), wrote a five-volume work on heretics around AD 180. He listed hundreds of groups, including the Carpocratians, who worshipped an image of Christ that they claimed had been painted by Pontius Pilate himself.

Irenaeus's heretics also included the radical Gnostic sect of the Cainites, who worshipped the Old Testament's Cain, who killed his own brother.

"An angel, they maintain, attends them in every one of their sinful and

"[The scribes] approached Judas and said to him, 'What are you doing here? You are Jesus's disciple.' Judas answered them as they wished. And he received some money and handed him over to them."

Extract from Gospel of Judas: Judas betrayed Christ.

abominable actions, and urges them to venture on audacity," wrote Irenaeus.

The inspiration for this questionable lifestyle came from the fallen disciple Judas, according to the bishop:

"They declare that Judas the traitor was thoroughly acquainted with these things, and that he alone, knowing the

Judas fuelled Jew hatred

Evil, spineless and covetous – since the Middle Ages, the traitor Judas has been an excuse for the persecution of Jews.

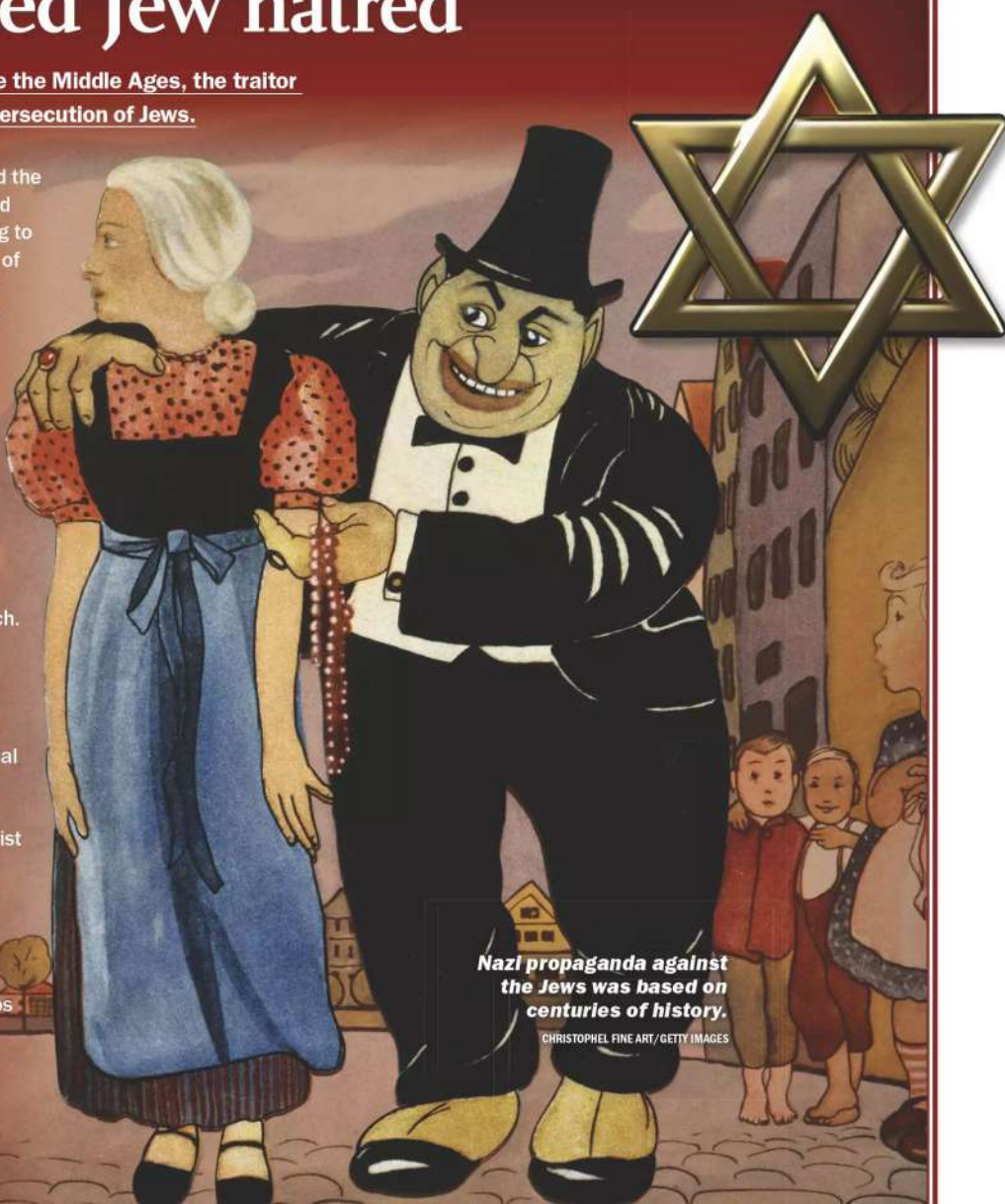
Anti-Semites have, for centuries, used the biblical figure of Judas to explain and justify their hatred of the Jews. According to the Bible, the traitor was paid 30 pieces of silver to identify Christ – a story that has fuelled the notion of Jews as particularly greedy and unscrupulous.

Church father Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin around AD 400, wrote that Judas was "cursed, [and] that in Judas the Jews may be accursed". "Whom do you suppose are the sons of Judas? The Jews ... Iscariot means money and price," he said.

In medieval art, Judas was often depicted wearing yellow clothing, the colour assigned to the Jews by the Church. Another characteristic is his red hair, which since ancient times has been attributed with several negative traits.

Right up until the Nazi era, Jews were attributed the same traits that the original Bible writers gave Judas – evil, cunning and unscrupulous behaviour.

The argument that the Jews killed Christ continues to be used by anti-Semites around the world, and the accusations – supported by the words of the Bible – have justified persecution, murder and ultimately the Holocaust. The biblical story of Judas is, said Israeli author Amos Oz in a 2017 newspaper interview, the "Chernobyl of Western anti-Semitism".



Nazi propaganda against the Jews was based on centuries of history.

CHRISTOPHER FINE ART / GETTY IMAGES

truth as no others did, accomplished the mystery of the betrayal; by him all things, both earthly and heavenly, were thus thrown into confusion. They produce a fictitious history of this kind, which they style the Gospel of Judas."

Irenaeus's description of the gospel is one of the few pieces of evidence that religious historians have of the cult of Judas, which turned faith on its head by worshipping the worst traitor in Christianity. But despite the Church's warnings, the Cainites gained followers. As late as the fourth century, the Bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, Epiphanius, had to warn against their influence:

"And they say that because of this Judas had found out all about them. For they claim him too as kin and regard him as possessed of superior knowledge, so that they even cite a short work in his name which they call a Gospel of Judas."

Game was up for Judas

It wasn't until the late fourth century that the heretical Gnostics were silenced with threats and executions. Therefore, they buried their writings in the Egyptian desert or hid them away in caves. A copy of the Gospel of Judas ended up in a cave near Qarara village, 250 kilometres south of Alexandria. There the precious manuscript would remain until the world was ready to understand Judas.

But that day never came, and before long no one remembered the hiding place. For the next 15 centuries, Judas took on the role of Christianity's chief villain. Pope Leo I in the mid-fifth century referred to Judas as "more wicked than all the rest, and more unhappy".

Throughout the Middle Ages, the figure of Judas was a frequent motif on frescoes and in Passion plays – dramatic performances depicting Christ's suffering and death. And Dante's work *The Divine Comedy* – a tale of Heaven, Hell and Purgatory written in the 14th century – Judas is in the very deepest part of Hell.

There was no indication that Judas's betrayal could ever be forgiven, but then came some unexpected news.

Lost gospel found

Without warning, on 9th April 2006, the lost Gospel of Judas was published in the US magazine *National Geographic*. For several years, experts had been restoring and translating the battered papyrus sheets from the Qarara cave – and finally Judas could speak:

"[This is] the secret account of the revelation that Jesus spoke in conversation

with Judas Iscariot during a week, three days before he celebrated Passover," was the gospel's introduction.

The years Jesus spent with his disciples as an itinerant preacher were skimmed over. What mattered was what happened between Christ and Judas in the last days. According to the gospel, Christ chose Judas to share in a special wisdom. Unlike the other disciples, whom Christ mocked, Judas knew the true nature of Christ: he was connected to the divine.

And Christ replied, "Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the kingdom."

Jesus asked for help with death

During the conversations, Christ told of a "great invisible [Spirit], which no eye of an angel has ever seen, no thought of the heart has ever comprehended, and it was never called by any name".

He told Judas that ever since Adam and Eve, humans had been wearing bodies as earthly shells, which lived for a limited time. Only those who had the wisdom and knew the mysteries could be freed from the flesh to become pure spirit.

Christ was ready to leave his earthly body, but to be released he needed Judas. The task would give Judas a special position among the disciples.

"[Y]ou will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me," said Christ, who thus awaited his death with the utmost serenity.

Christ made no secret of the fact that others would not approve of Judas's act. "[You] will be cursed," he said bluntly. And in a dream, Judas saw himself being stoned by the other disciples.

The gospel ends with Judas leaving Christ to go to the temple. There he met some scribes who asked him if he was one of Christ's disciples:

"And he received some money and handed him over to them."

Betrayed by his own gospel

The emergence of the Gospel of Judas in 2006 was a sensation. Many saw it as an alternative Bible that would contribute to a whole new understanding of Christ's teachings and the events of Easter. But something niggled: the mention of the insight that Judas supposedly had and that Christ's body was a perishable shell proved that it was a Gnostic text. Thus, nothing of what Christ had allegedly said could be attributed any value.

Once the novelty wore off, Judas was back in his old role – as the most contemptible villain in 2,000 years. ■

"Judas character adds to the drama"



When the Gospel of Judas came to light, it was called an anti-bible. Is it?

Jesper Hyldahl: "Gnostics defend the Bible. It is therefore wrong to call the Gospel of Judas an anti-Bible. Indeed, if you look at it solely from a non-Gnostic approach, many Gnostic texts can appear to contradict the Old and New Testaments. The Gnostics themselves use their own texts to create a level of understanding that actually helps to make sense of the biblical texts."

Is there any point where Christians can agree with the Gnostics?

Jesper Hyldahl: "There are several points where they agree, but we emphasise the differences. Both sides say that the world has its origin in God, and that Christ was sent from God and lived in the world to save lost mankind. But when you go into the details and say who God is, there is great disagreement, and it develops into opposing views."

The betrayal led to the crucifixion of Christ. Subsequently, the church was given an emblem, the cross. Where would the church be without Judas?

Jesper Hyldahl: "I'm not sure his absence would have had much impact. It is basically God who delivers and sacrifices himself for crucifixion, and it would have happened with or without a Judas. But the Judas character adds to the drama and tells us about what we as humans can lower ourselves to."

Is it OK to compare a footballer who wants to change clubs to Judas?

Jesper Hyldahl: "The other day I saw a Lionel Messi sticker on a lamppost with 'Judas' written in bold letters. The legacy of the Bible has made Judas synonymous with traitor. I could think of something worse than changing teams. As such, it's an exaggeration that doesn't compare to the Judas of the Bible. But for football fans, maybe there are important things at stake."

God's foremost PR agent

*As young Jew, **PAUL** mercilessly persecuted Christ's followers until he heard God's voice while travelling to Damascus. He then became Christ's greatest advocate. With huge determination, he opened up the strictly Jewish sect to anyone who wanted to join and changed the world for ever. Christianity was ready to become a world religion.*

Gentiles were welcome

BAPTISM FOR EVERYONE Paul believed that everyone – including Gentiles – should be saved from Judgement Day.

NO CIRCUMCISION Christians did not have to circumcise baby boys like the Jews did.

EAT WHAT YOU LIKE God did not interfere with what Christians ate, Paul ruled.



The ageing Paul was put under house arrest while awaiting his fate. Whether he was executed in Rome or allowed to continue his mission in Spain is unclear.

REMBRANDT: "ST PAUL IN PRISON",
1627 / GETTY IMAGES & SHUTTERSTOCK

BY ANTE GERD POULSEN

An agitated mob of Jews pushed a man in front of them, shoving and beating him. The man's name was Stephen, and he was a Jew but also a member of a small sect that believed in Christ.

Stephen had preached against the temple in Jerusalem and the Law of Moses. Pure blasphemy, according to the furious men around him, so Stephen was sentenced to death by the Jewish council of elders.

The angry crowd reached Jerusalem's city walls, where they began picking up stones from the ground. Among the group was a man named Paul. Despite his young age, he was already known as a fierce opponent of the Christian sect, but on that day, he held back – he merely looked after the men's cloaks as they carried out the death sentence.

Stephen tried to protect himself with his arms, but couldn't escape his fate. The stones struck him as he sank to his knees and recited a final prayer:

"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

The men rained heavy stones down on him. Soon Stephen lay lifeless in the dust as a pool of blood spread around his head. He was the first Christian martyr.

The year was AD 35 and the scene is described in the Acts of the Apostles –



Stoning was a punishment used by ancient Jews for religious offences and adultery.

SHUTTERSTOCK

a book in the New Testament. No one present that day at Jerusalem's city walls could have imagined the impact Paul would have on Christianity. His interpretation of Christ's teachings made it possible to transform the small Jewish sect into a world religion. Paul's letters are also the oldest texts in the New Testament – and the first Christian testimonies.

Blood flowed in Paul's birthplace

Most scholars agree that Paul is a historical figure who came into the world a few years after the birth of Jesus. From events and named individuals referred to in his letters, as well as his mention in the Acts of the

Apostles, it is possible to reconstruct large parts of his life.

He was born around AD 8 to a Jewish family in the city of Tarsus, the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia (now south-eastern Turkey). According to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's father was a Roman citizen and a successful tentmaker. On his wanderings through the bustling city, the young Paul became acquainted with a colourful world, because Tarsus was home to all kinds of people – merchants, Roman legionaries, sailors, pirates and craftsmen.

Each group worshipped their own gods. Mithraism was popular in Tarsus. Followers worshipped the god of light, Mithras. They drank the steaming blood of a sacrificial bull, and new initiates bathed in the blood to take on the animal's strength. The Jewish boy must have been scared by the ritual, as the Torah forbids Jews to consume blood.

As a prosperous tentmaker, Paul's father probably had employees who made canopies for the street traders. He would have passed on his craft to his son, but even more important was the introduction to the Jewish faith. That's why young Paul was sent to Jerusalem.

Hunt for Christ's followers

Being among the temple scholars in the Jewish holy city, Paul developed into a fanatical Pharisee – a faith that adhered strictly to the letter of the Law of Moses. For example, the Pharisees believed that Christ could not be the Son of God because God would never allow his son to die on a cross, a punishment reserved for slaves and criminals.

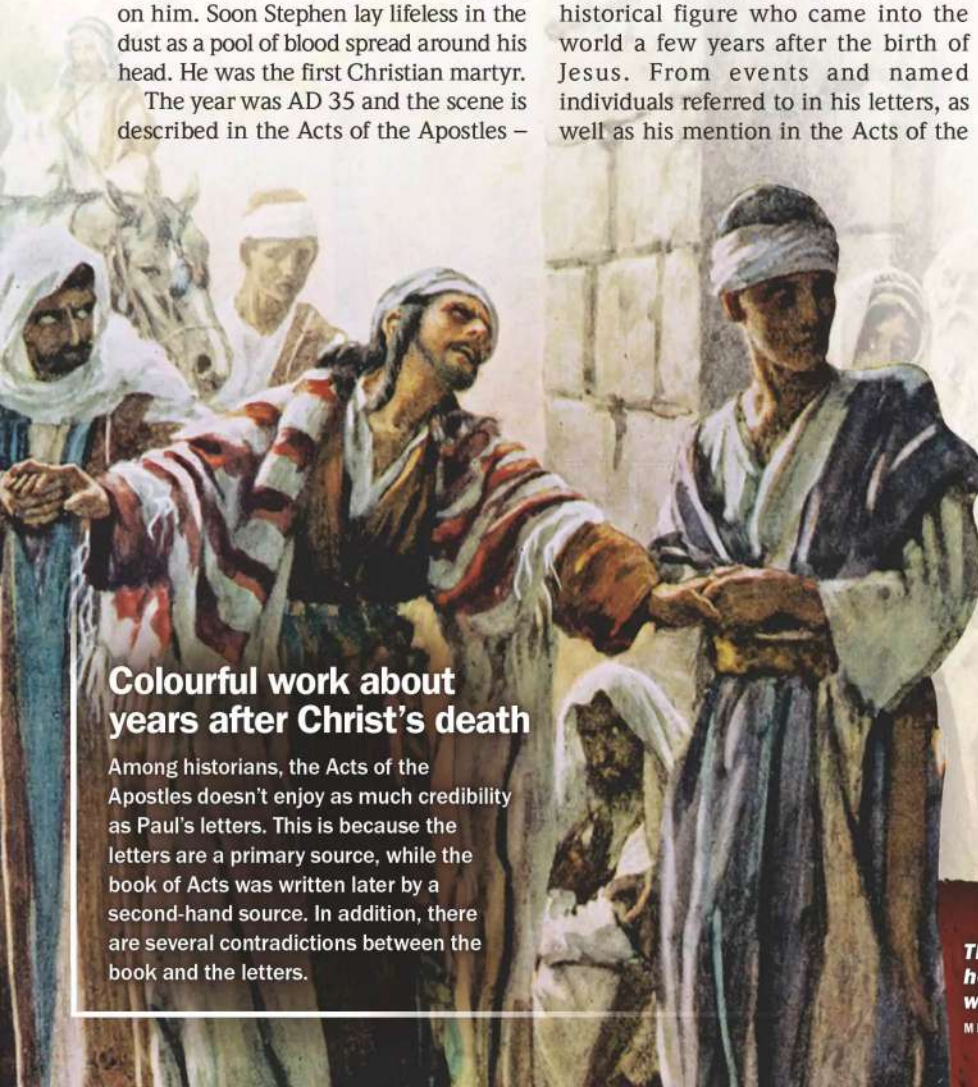
Christ's followers had come together in a sect calling itself The Way, and Paul eagerly participated in its persecution.

"For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God," the converted Paul later wrote in his letter to the Galatians.

The Acts of the Apostles contains far more colourful accounts that tell us that after Stephen's stoning, Jews began a slaughter of the Christians in the city. Paul was among the most zealous as he "made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and

Colourful work about years after Christ's death

Among historians, the Acts of the Apostles doesn't enjoy as much credibility as Paul's letters. This is because the letters are a primary source, while the book of Acts was written later by a second-hand source. In addition, there are several contradictions between the book and the letters.

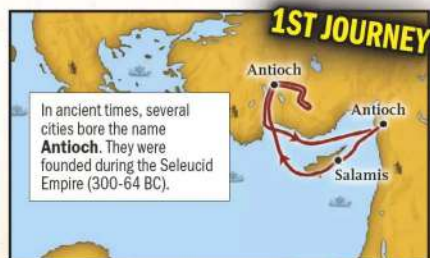


The blind Paul had to be helped into Damascus, where he met Christians.

M EVANS/SCANPIX

Paul travelled over 16,000 km

After his conversion, Paul wanted to spread the Christian message. His missionary journeys took him far and wide in the countries around the Mediterranean, where he founded several churches.



Out among the Gentiles

Paul's first missionary journey (AD 46-48) took him to **Cyprus and Asia Minor**. In each city, he took a job and shared the news of Christ.



Journey was longer than planned

During his second journey (AD 49-52), Paul was invited in a vision to be a missionary in the Roman province of **Macedonia** (Greece).



Reunion with old friends

Paul's third journey (AD 52-57) took him **back to several of the churches** he had founded in Asia Minor and Macedonia.



women, committed them to prison". Many Christians fled Jerusalem, but Paul was "yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord". The Jewish council authorised him to hunt them down in Damascus.

Christians' persecutor saw the light
Paul set off but on the way to Damascus, everything changed. He soberly

described the event as a revelation, while the Acts of the Apostles is richer in detail: "Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him:

"Saul, why persecutest thou me?"
"And he said, 'Who art thou, Lord?'
"And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutes ... Arise, and go

into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

According to the Acts of the Apostles, three days followed during which Paul was blind and had to be helped to Damascus. Only there did he regain his sight and receive his calling: to spread the faith in Jesus Christ. All the energy that he had previously put into the persecution of the Christian sect ▶

DID YOU KNOW that Paul is called Saul at the beginning of Acts? He changed his name after his conversion. In the letters, he only called himself Paul.



Paul became so unpopular in Damascus that the Christians had to rescue him.

was now used to win followers for the new faith.

Paul travelled for three years to Arabia, now Jordan, then returned to Damascus, where he was persecuted himself. Whether it was because he preached that Christ was the new king

is unknown, but Paul was so unpopular with the Arab King Aretas that his fellow believers had to help him make a dramatic escape over the city walls.

"In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me. And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands," he reported in 2 Corinthians.

Judgement Day was near

The daring flight from Damascus was just his first taste of the dangerous life of a missionary, but Paul was not intimidated. Over the next 20 years, he travelled the eastern Mediterranean, founding churches and baptising the new members he found among both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews).

Other followers of Christ who had fled Jerusalem after Stephen's stoning also went on missionary expeditions, founding churches in Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt, among other places. Some of them even found their way to Rome.

But neither Paul nor the other missionaries planned to build a new world religion. Christ had said that the Day of Judgement (the end of the world) was very near, and it was important to

save as many people as possible before it happened.

"Treasurer up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds," as Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Rome.

Travelling man of crafts and miracles

Paul covered around 16,500 kilometres on his missionary journeys. He spent 281 days on foot and as a passenger on cargo ships, where he had to stay on deck for days in blazing sun or roaring storms. He survived three shipwrecks.

Unlike Christ, who had preached in small Jewish fishing and farming communities, Paul, a city man, sought out the crowds of Greco-Roman cities to proselytise.

Passing through the gates of cities such as Antioch, Corinth or Ephesus, he took a job as a tentmaker in one of the workshops. Through the craftsmen, he quickly gained a large network of contacts, which he used for his mission.

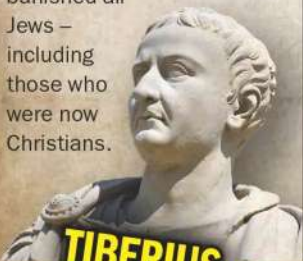
The workshops were typically located in densely packed neighbourhoods, often on the ground floor of multi-storey buildings. Behind the workshops were small sleeping quarters, while the floors above were homes. Ninety per cent of

Christians lived in dangerous times

Roman emperors could be capricious and brutal. Therefore, the Christian message that God's righteous judgement would fall on sinners was well received in the churches.

Christ **CRUCIFIED** under Tiberius

Tiberius (AD 14-37) was hardly involved when Christ was crucified, but it was during his reign. After, the Christian movement grew and reached Rome, where believers came into conflict with traditional Jews. To calm things down, Tiberius banished all Jews – including those who were now Christians.



TIBERIUS

Caligula wanted to be **WORSHIPPED** as a god

Caligula (AD 37-41) insisted that he was a god. Unlike his predecessors, he built temples and statues to himself. However, when he tried to place a statue of himself in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, the province was close to revolt.



CALIGULA

Claudius **CRACKED** DOWN on Christians

Under Caesar, the Jews had enjoyed special privileges. Claudius (AD 41-54) abolished them and promoted Agrippa to king of Judea. He kept the peace by opposing Christ's followers. Among other things, he had James the Apostle executed and arrested the Apostle Peter. When Agrippa died in 44, new uprisings broke out.



CLAUDIUS

Christians **BURNED** in Nero's garden

Nero came to power in AD 54. Ten years later, a fire destroyed much of Rome and Nero blamed the Christians. Punishment was barbaric: Christians were crucified, thrown to the lions and used as living torches in Nero's gardens.



NERO

the residents of a Greco-Roman city lived in one modest room with no kitchen or other luxuries. They were relegated to buying food at small stalls and defecating in public latrines.

Belief in magic and divination permeated society from top to bottom, and people were prepared to believe in miracles. According to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul was skilful – he made a crippled man walk and a young man rise from the dead. He was more modest:

“Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds,” he wrote in 2 Corinthians.

Normally, the title apostle is reserved for the disciples who followed Jesus, but Paul must have been given – or taken – the position that became vacant after Judas’s suicide.

Rich were patrons

People from all walks of life were drawn to him, and the churches almost mirrored the social structure, with many poor and few rich. Paul didn’t reach the absolute elite, but some wealthy citizens were happy to attend services.

In establishing his churches, Paul was inspired by the Roman patron-client system. The way it worked was that an influential Roman (the patron) helped everyone associated with his household (the clients) in exchange for their complete loyalty. In Rome, the patron gave material goods in exchange for the clients’ votes. In the churches, Paul gave guidance and gained the trust of the faithful. He therefore referred to believers as brothers and sisters – and to himself as father.

As Paul travelled, he kept in touch with the churches through letters, which were copied extensively and shared with other churches. His original letters have been lost, probably worn out by countless readings. But before that, the letters were copied and shared – and it is these copies that have ensured that his instructions survived to be included in the New Testament.

The letters provide an insight into the problems and doubts of the early Christians, but also into the opposition Paul faced. They also show that the

churches regularly disagreed about how Christians should live.

Paul answered questions such as, was it acceptable to seek out prostitutes? Could you eat the meat from sacrifices made by Gentiles? Should the resurrection be taken literally? He answered: “Abstain from fornication,” “Meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse,” and “[No], flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”

‘Chiefest apostle’ infuriated Paul

In several letters, Paul scolded the churches for listening to other, seemingly know-it-all missionaries, whom he mockingly called “chiefest apostles” (2 Corinthians):

“For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. For I suppose

I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles. But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things.”

Paul may not have been an oratorical genius, but he was a master of the written word, in which his thoughts or arguments could be studied again and again, and read aloud to congregations, the vast majority of whom were illiterate.

Paul’s writings testify to a stubborn and temperamental man who did not shy away from confrontation. Both within the Christian movement, in relation to the Jews and in encounters with Gentiles, heated discussions arose about the right way to live. Several times he was flogged and thrown into prison, and once he was stoned, but he was always more concerned about his followers’ well-being than his own:

“Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of ▶

Riots regularly broke out when the Jews heard Paul speak about Christ. When they did, Roman soldiers took decisive action.

AKG IMAGES



DID YOU KNOW that the author of the Acts of the Apostles is unknown? Scholars hypothesise that the book was written by the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke around AD 70.

Post from Paul

The New Testament contains 13 letters from Paul. Academics believe that six of them were written by others. The seven genuine Pauline letters are thus the oldest texts in the New Testament and the primary source of scholars' knowledge about Paul.

Fear of Judgement Day plagues church

■ **Recipient:** The church in Thessalonica, which Paul founded.

■ **Content:** The church is in turmoil because Paul has said that everyone must be saved. Now some members have died. Paul replies that **both the living and the dead will be saved**. He also talks about Christ's return.

OLDEST

Letter to the Thessalonians, AD 50.

Church is close to disintegration

■ **Recipient:** The church in Corinth, which Paul founded. (The first letter was preceded by at least one other that's been lost.)

■ **1st letter:** There are problems in the church because of the different social status of its members. The familiar social order with clear relationships between master and slave and woman and man is faltering due to the impending Judgement Day, and the believers in Corinth are divided. Paul writes that they **must come together**.

■ **2nd letter:** Paul is angry that the church is listening to other missionaries who mock his poor oratory skills and have different messages. Paul **mockingly calls them "chiefest apostles"** and bites back.

INSTRUCTIONS

Letters to the Corinthians, AD 53 & 54.

Missionaries cause unrest in Galatia

■ **Recipient:** Paul's church in Galatia, a Roman province in Asia Minor.

■ **Content:** Other missionaries have visited and said that Gentiles must be circumcised in order to follow Christ and that Paul has downplayed the importance of the Law of Moses to gain popularity. Paul retorts angrily and states that his interpretation is approved by the **Apostle Peter**.

PUT IN PLACE

Letter to the Galatians, c. AD 55.

Warning against false apostles

■ **Recipient:** The church in Philippi (near Thessalonica).

■ **Content:** Paul gives thanks for the money that has been collected. He **warns against missionaries** who preach the circumcision of Gentiles. He calls them "dogs". The letter was probably written under house arrest in Rome.

"DOGS!"

Letter to the Philippians, c. AD 60.

Greetings to a slave owner

■ **Recipient:** A Christian who lived in the city of Colossae (near Izmir).

■ **Content:** During his imprisonment in Ephesus, Paul met a runaway slave, Onesimus. Paul sends him home to his owner, Philemon, with the request to **set the slave free** or let Paul pay for him.

PERSONAL

Letter to Philemon, c. AD 56.

Paul wants to go to Rome and Spain

■ **Recipient:** The Christian church in Rome, which Paul has not been involved in founding.

■ **Content:** Paul explains that man is eternally lost and **can only be saved through faith**. The letter also serves as an introduction to Paul prior to a planned missionary journey to Rome and on to Spain.

ON WAY TO ROME

Letter to the Romans, c. AD 55.

The other six Pauline letters were probably written in whole or in part by others. In ancient times, it was common to give credit to others for a piece of writing – it was not considered forgery.

FAKE LETTERS

waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren," he listed in 2 Corinthians and continued:

"Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?" he asked rhetorically.

Eternal dispute over circumcision

Christ's followers were far from unanimous on where to spread the message. Some proselytised exclusively among Jews, others among Gentiles. Some believed that Gentiles needed to convert to Judaism and be circumcised in order to gain access to The Way.

Paul was adamant that Gentiles should not be circumcised. In a letter to the Gentile Galatian Christians, Paul chastised the church for considering circumcision again:

"Foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? ... Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"

Circumcision was the major issue of contention within the sect, and Paul had two strong opponents – the Apostle Peter and Christ's brother James.

The dispute threatened to divide Christ's followers. To resolve the conflict once and for all, the Apostles organised a meeting in Jerusalem around the year 50. As a result of the heated debate, Paul was vindicated and the demand for the circumcision of Gentiles was dropped. Baptism was now the main initiation ritual, opening up the sect to a huge influx of non-Jews.

Trouble at the Temple of Artemis

Paul set out on his third and longest missionary journey, and around AD 56, he reached Ephesus in what is now Turkey. The city was the centre of the cult of the goddess Artemis, and her huge temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It attracted thousands of visitors and was the



Paul's fate is uncertain. Later sources say that a soldier executed him in Rome, but Paul may have embarked on a new missionary journey that took him to Spain.

centre of a large souvenir industry – archaeologists have found models of the temple and silver replicas of the goddess.

As Paul spread his message of one God, he was therefore perceived as a threat to the city's business base. A prominent silversmith, Dimitrios, who made a good living making souvenirs for the Artemis cult, called a public meeting in the city's amphitheatre, which could hold 24,000 people.

The atmosphere became so heated that the Romans had to arrest Paul for disturbing public order. The Romans weren't interested in the religion of their empire's citizens, but so many agitated people in one place posed a danger.

In prison, Paul enjoyed a certain amount of freedom. He was allowed to receive visitors and write letters – among them a letter to the Corinthians. He asked them to raise money for the poor in Jerusalem, and when he was released, he went to the city to distribute the funds. At the time, he was in his early 50s and heading towards his own personal judgement day.

Apostle ended up in prison

Paul barely made it to Jerusalem before he got into a fight with a group of

Jews. As he was about to share the news of his conversion, he was interrupted by shouts from some angry men:

"Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live," they cried, according to the Acts of the Apostles, and they "cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air" in rage.

The city governor took Paul and held him prisoner for two years. Paul demanded to plead his case before the emperor in Rome – it was his right as a Roman citizen – and finally he set off in the company of several of his fellow believers and a military escort.

In Rome, he was placed under house arrest, but was allowed to receive guests, hold services and write letters.

What happened next is not known. The Acts of the Apostles ends abruptly – as though there is a sequel that never happened. Some scholars believe Paul escaped and continued to Spain.

Others point to a letter written by Bishop Clement of Rome, who shortly before AD 100 wrote to the church in Corinth to tell them that Paul had been martyred in Rome. But Paul's work didn't stop. Over the next 300 years, the small Jewish sect grew into the state religion of the Roman Empire. ■

DID YOU KNOW that the Apostles are each depicted with their own distinctive features? Peter carries the key to Heaven's gates, while Paul has a book and a sword, with which he was supposedly executed. 45

Egypt's early Christians used spells:

Mysterious book is full of magic

Early Christians mixed the teachings of Christ with magic invocations. A 1,300-year-old book that has only recently been translated has surprised scholars.

BY THERESE BOISEN HAAS

For years, ten yellowed sheets that had turned up in a Viennese antiquities shop in 1981 had puzzled academics. Until, that is, an Australian research team from Macquarie University in Sydney finally solved the puzzle: the sheets were a spell book written by some of the world's first Christians – the Egyptians.

The 1,300-year-old book was written in Coptic, the language spoken in Egypt before the Arabs invaded in AD 642. The whereabouts of the manuscript for more than 1,000 years before it turned up in the hands of an antiquities dealer in the Austrian capital is still a mystery.

The book is full of references to the Bible but, surprisingly, it also contains spells that could be useful in all sorts of circumstances. From removing warts and curing deadly diseases to making another person submit or fall in love, the reader could get help with everything.

The manuscript also contains a number of prayers, and academics believe that the spells and prayers were originally two separate documents that were combined into one book on the ten sheets. In this way, the Egyptian scribe attempted to combine the power of Christianity with ancient occultism to create a powerful tool.

Author of book is unknown

Whether the book was written by a monk or priest – or was created outside of the church – is unknown:

"It is my sense that there were ritual practitioners outside the ranks of the clergy and monks, but exactly who they were is shielded from us by the fact that people didn't really want to be labelled as a 'magician'," explained ▶

Elements of Sethianism

Sect appeared on pages

The spell book contains elements from Sethianism, which rose to prominence in the third century AD.

1 More than one Christ

"Seth, Seth, the living Christ." The Sethians included their own interpretation of Christ and Christian teachings in their faith, but also honoured Adam and Eve's third son, Seth, as the son of God.

2 Cross-gendered Holy Spirit

"Barbelo, the living wisdom who was filled from the two loins of the Father and has begotten for us a perfect living man."

The book mentions Barbelo, a dual figure, both male and female, with two names, Barbelo and Sofia. They were the Holy Spirit in the Christian trinity and goddess of wisdom in the Sethian interpretation of Christian doctrine.

3 Magical nonsense

"EI IAIAB, IABADO BATABA!" The manuscript is full of religious 'nonsense words' that cannot be translated, but whose sound and letter combinations were given a special power.

Christianity came early to Egypt, but elements of ancient beliefs still existed there.

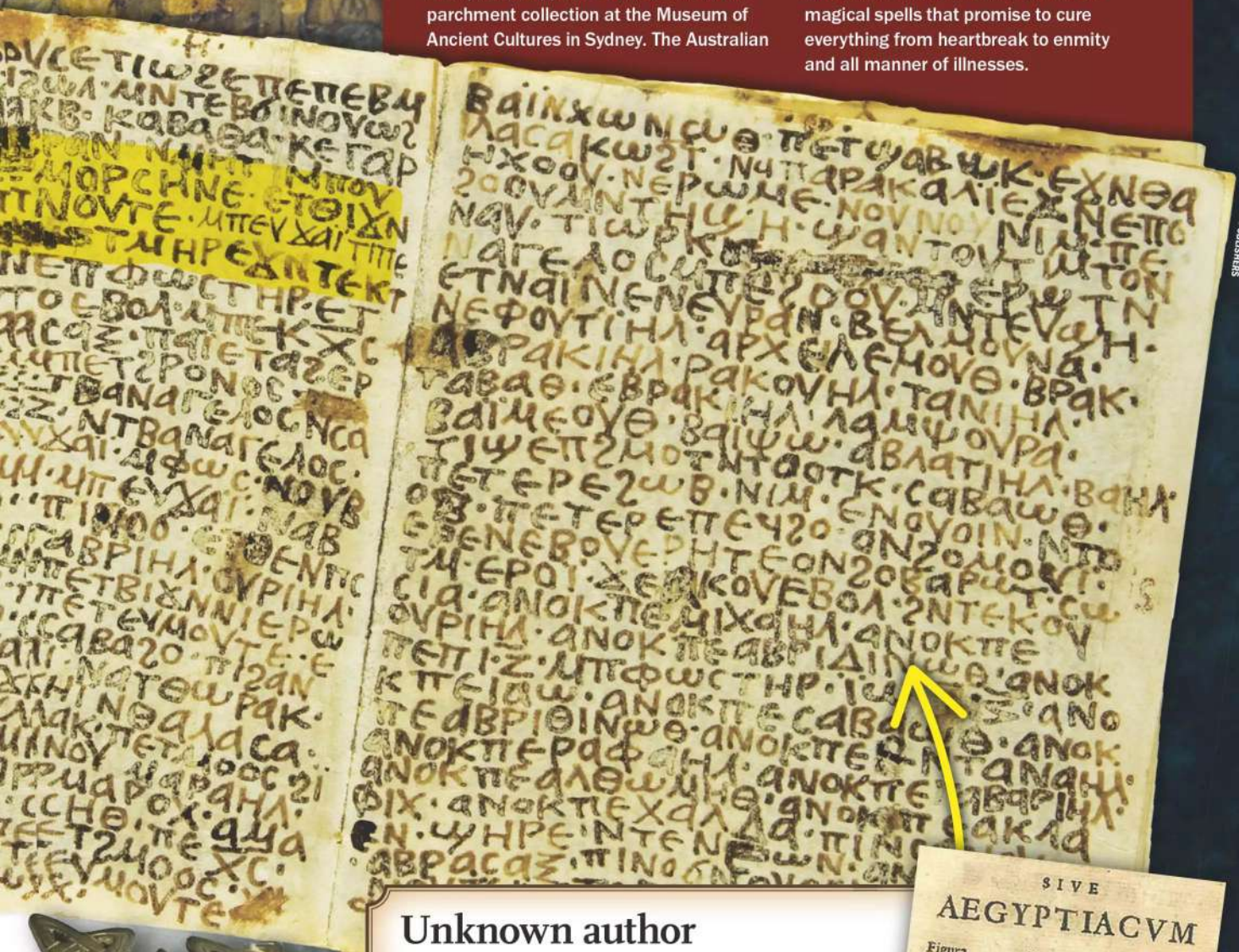
J. POLLEROS / THE IMAGE WORKS

10 sheets of prayers and spells

The Egyptian spell book consists of ten closely written sheets made from processed animal skin, bound together at the spine with string. The manuscript is the first in a series of publications of ancient Egyptian manuscripts entitled Macquarie Papyri after the name of the parchment collection at the Museum of Ancient Cultures in Sydney. The Australian

research team working on the manuscript dated the papyrus to the seventh or eighth century, and some passages are illegible due to the ravages of time.

The contents of the manuscript fall into three parts: prayers and incantations, ritual instructions and finally a list of magical spells that promise to cure everything from heartbreak to enmity and all manner of illnesses.



Unknown author

Who wrote the ten sheets of spells is unknown, but academics concluded that the words were written in the Coptic dialect of Sahidic, which was spoken in Upper Egypt. Lay people couldn't write, so the scribe was likely a Coptic monk – a fact supported by a reference to “brothers” in a spell. The book's untidy text suggests that the scribe was busy and may have been working in secret.

The Coptic alphabet is a mixture of letters from the Greek and ancient Demotic alphabets.

SIVE AEGYPTIACVM			
Figura	Nomen	Potestas.	
Α α	Αλφα	Alpha	A
Β β	Βιτα	Vida	V
Γ γ	Γαμμα	Gamma	G
Δ δ	Δαλτα	Dalda	D
Ε ε	Ει	Ei	E
Ϝ ϝ	So	So	S
Ζ ζ	Ζιτα	Zida	Z
Η η	Ητα	Hida	I

BREPOS PUBLISHERS

REPERIMTO IN TERMA SANCTAM

Professor Malcolm Choat, who led the work.

In addition to references to Christ and Christian teachings, the book also contains a number of mystical characters, including the Baktiotha, "lord over the forty and the nine kinds of serpents". The figure originates from the ancient faith of Sethianism:

"The Baktiotha is an ambivalent figure. He is a great power and a ruler of forces in the material realm," said Choat.

Evidence of mystical religion

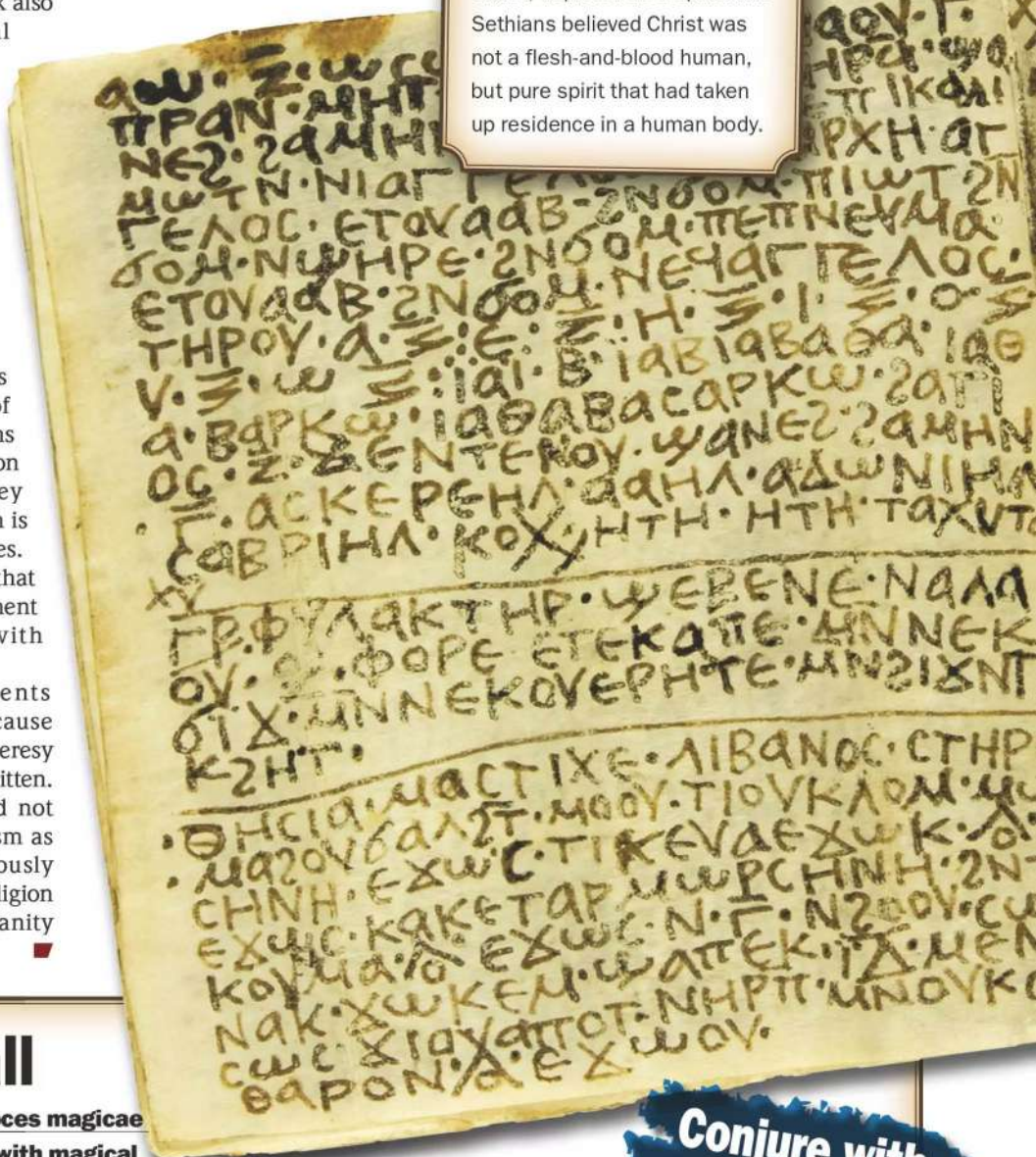
And perhaps the Sethian features hold the answer to the riddle of who wrote the book. The Sethians were named after Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, whom they worshipped alongside Christ. Seth is mentioned many times in the pages.

Academics therefore believe that the book is a transitional document that combines Sethianism with Christian doctrine.

The many Sethian elements surprised the researchers because Sethianism had been classed as heresy 400 years before the book was written. This proves that Christians did not succeed in eradicating Sethianism as early as historians had previously assumed. On the contrary, the religion had coexisted alongside Christianity for centuries.

Christ as spirit

This figure probably represents Christ, depicted as a spirit. The Sethians believed Christ was not a flesh-and-blood human, but pure spirit that had taken up residence in a human body.



Magic for all

The book contains a spell in voces magicae – words without meaning, but with magical power. You must recite the spell clearly for maximum effect: IAEO BARHRENMOUN ONITHILARI LITHONINUOMENERPHABOEAL.

- 1 To make your woman pregnant**
Say the spell over flower water. Give her the flower water to drink. Say the spell again.
- 2 To gain power over another person**
Say the spell over two nails. Drive them into your victim's door frame, one on one side, one on the other.



Conjure with the Copts

- 3 For stubborn warts**
Mix oil with an extract of palm leaves and asparagus. Apply the oil to the warts and recite the spell.
- 4 Miracle cure for all diseases**
Repeat the spell over virgin olive oil. Anoint the patient with the oil.
- 5 To win the affection of another**
Say the spell before you leave your house. Say it again before speaking to your intended.

Coptic
asylum
seekers wait
in line to be
registered.

Egypt's Christians under threat

Christians dominated Egypt until the Muslim conquest of the country in 642. Today, the believers are called Copts (Greek for Egyptians) and make up 10-20 per cent of the population. Copts and Muslims lived in peace until relatively recently, but Islamist violence and church burnings have sent thousands of Copts fleeing. In February 2015, 21 Copts were executed by the terrorist organisation Islamic State.

Four spirits were God's helpers

In Sethianism, God has four aeons, helper spirits, named Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithai and Eleleth. Their names are written on the Christ figure in the book. Christ also holds two round figures and two more hover either side of his head. Researchers believe that these figures represent the helper spirits.

Egyptian Christians, the Copts, have their own pope, Tawadros II.

GETTY IMAGES



The prophet Mani posed a dangerous threat to Christianity:

Jesus' main rival

By the third century AD, Manichaeism was a world religion that spread from Persia to China and Spain. But it came up against powerful rulers who wiped out both its founder, Mani, and his teachings.



MANI

PERSIAN EMPIRE/AD 240



The region between the Mediterranean and China was a melting pot of religions. Christians, Buddhists, Jews and polytheists lived side by side, freely exchanging ideas with one another.

BY JANNICH KOFOED

Christians viewed the Manichaean churches that spread throughout the Eastern Roman Empire from around AD 381 with suspicion. They believed their followers to be heretics and, as the religion had spread from Rome's arch rival, the Persian Empire, probably spies, too.

Fifty years earlier, the Roman Emperor had been converted to the true faith, but the young Christian Church did not yet feel that Christianity had become firmly established among the general population. Therefore, they approached

Emperor Theodosius I and asked him to put an end to Manichaeism.

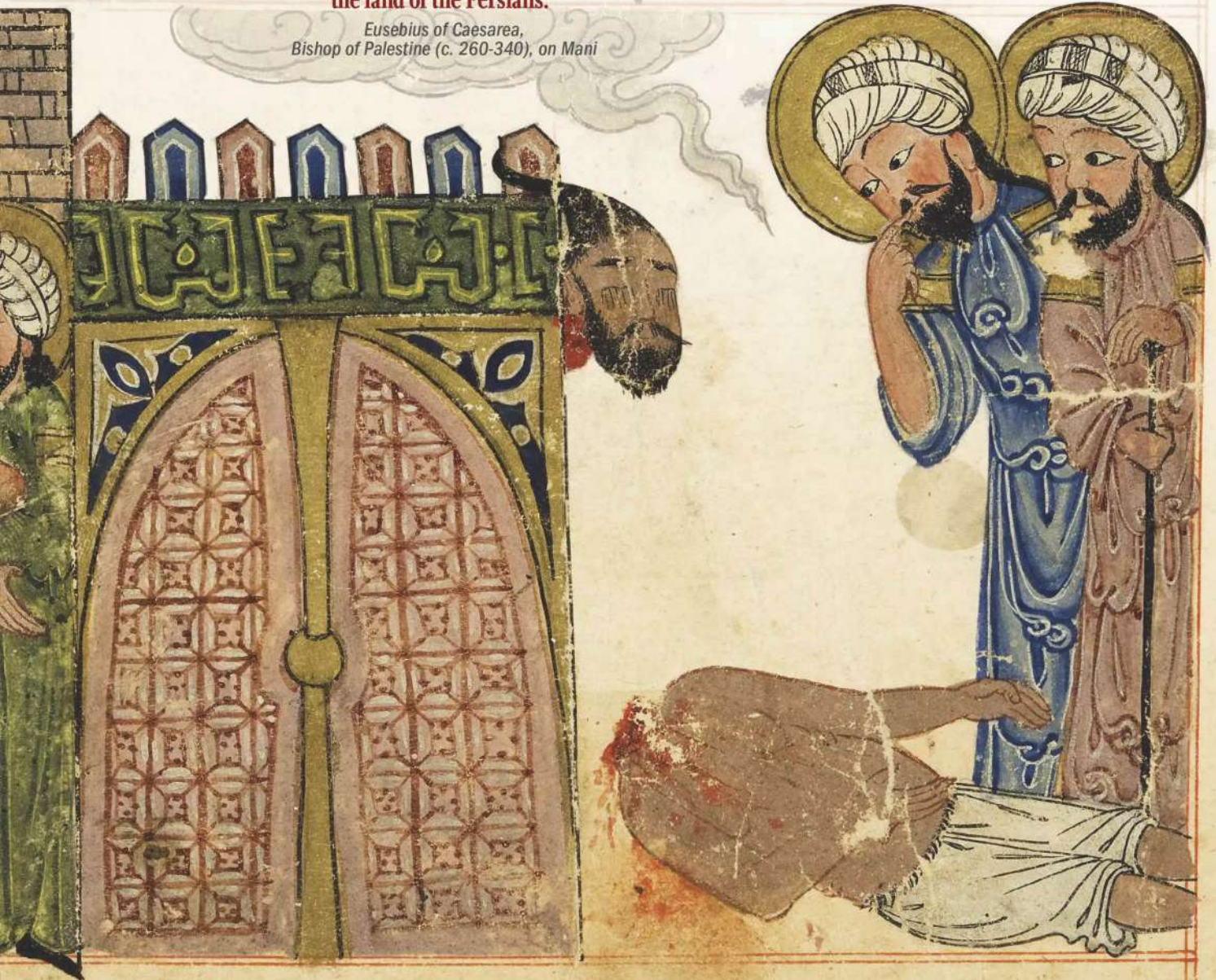
A zealous Christian, Theodosius signed a decree in 382 condemning Manichaean monks to death. He later toughened the laws even further and banned all pagan rituals – even within the home. The Christian religion would now reign supreme among Romans.

God spoke to a 12-year-old boy

By this point Mani, who founded and gave his name to Manichaeism, had been dead for over 150 years. Born in 216 in the city of Mardinu on the Tigris

"[He] attempted to pose as Christ... He stitched together false and godless doctrines... and infected our empire with, as it were, a deadly poison that came from the land of the Persians."

Eusebius of Caesarea,
Bishop of Palestine (c. 260-340), on Mani



River, he later told his disciples that he'd received his first revelation as a child. The 12-year-old boy had been reprimanded for drawing and painting, which was strictly forbidden in the Judeo-Christian sect where he grew up. He found himself sitting alone on the riverbank, looking down into the water, when his reflection suddenly spoke.

"Greetings to you, Mani, from me, and from the One who sent me. Draw what seems to be right to thee, Mani. He who sends me knows no rival. All beauty is the reflection of His beauty," it said. The mirror image then told Mani

that he should follow in the footsteps of the prophets and carry God's message to all corners of the world, but that he should wait for a final sign.

"The time is not right for you to appear, for you are still young."

For 12 years, Mani waited until the angel finally reappeared: "He [The Lord] has commanded you to... preach on His behalf the Truth, laying it upon you to do so with your utmost effort."

Prophet gained his first followers

Soon after, the 24 year old bade farewell to the strict sect. After four days of travel,

Mani suffered a gruesome fate. First, he was starved to death. Then his torturers dismembered him and hung his body parts over the city gates.

BRIDGEMAN/AGK-IMAGES

he sat in the shade of a tree in Ctesiphon – near modern-day Baghdad. As was his habit, Mani took out his brush from his cloak and began to paint: bright, colourful images of flowers, animals and people. But Mani wasn't simply painting and preaching to entertain the crowd that gradually gathered – he was in the process of recruiting his first followers.

Mani praised neither brave warriors nor wealth and honour. Instead, the ►

Manichaeism elect left work to their followers

The Manichaean code of conduct was so strict that its followers couldn't survive if everyone had to follow it. As a result, few lived by the book.

In his writings, Mani wrote that good and evil existed in every creature: the soul was pure while the body was impure, and the pure soul could only prevail if the light was strengthened.

To strengthen the powers of light, it was important to avoid physical labour, not to harm plants or animals and to limit one's sexual drive to pure procreation. But since the Manichaeans also had to survive, their followers – called the hearers – had to

take on the forbidden work: ploughing, sowing, harvesting and cooking.

The sins committed by lay people were taken upon themselves by the Manichaean elect – the chosen ones.

The elect lived by Manichaeism's strict demands. They also fasted, said prayers, read, wrote, sang and painted. After sunset, they gathered for one daily meal with food believed to contain particularly high levels of light particles: cucumbers, courgettes,



Manichaean manuscripts were usually colourful and intricate.

light-coloured squashes and unleavened wheat bread. The chosen ones fasted 100 days a year, including one continuous 30-day stretch.

The followers also fasted, but only on Sundays and Mondays, and they had to say four prayers a day. Hearers could achieve salvation, but it required several reincarnations.

Mani's 10 laws

The Manichaean way of life

- * You must only live with a single partner.
- * You shall reject all sexual excesses.
- * You shall not lie.
- * You shall not be a hypocrite.
- * You shall not worship idols.
- * You shall not practise sorcery.
- * You shall not kill animals.
- * You shall not steal.
- * You shall not doubt Mani's teachings.
- * You must nurture the 'elect' (chosen ones).

Bible's 10 laws

Christianity's 10 Commandments

- * You shall have no other gods before Me.
- * You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
- * Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy.
- * Honour your father and mother.
- * You shall not murder.
- * You shall not commit adultery.
- * You shall not steal.
- * You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
- * Do not covet your neighbour's house.
- * Do not covet your neighbour's wife, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey or his possessions.

Adam and Eve's fall and expulsion from Paradise was also part of Manichaean scriptures.

new prophet explained that the untainted soul – symbolised by light – was trapped in an impure body. He urged his audience not to lie, steal or cheat – all so that the light would prevail when Judgement Day came.

This seemingly harmless message was not so innocuous in the Persian Empire around AD 240. King Ardashir was a follower of the Zoroastrianism religion and had granted special privileges to its priests. Courts and schools were in their hands, allowing them to act in an increasingly aggressive fashion towards the empire's many faiths. Jewish

synagogues had been banned and Zoroastrian priests had spies everywhere.

Mani didn't spend long in Ctesiphon before he and his new-found followers moved on. They travelled through the empire, reaching remote parts of modern-day Armenia, Turkey and Afghanistan, converting many to the new faith. Mani even sailed across the Indian Ocean to the city of Deb at the Indus River's mouth.

Deb was an important trading hub at the time, where dozens of cultures met. In the city, Christians, Jews, Buddhists and Zoroastrian worshippers lived peacefully side by side, and the inquisitive

Mani thrived here. He met scholars from all faiths and soaked up ideas – so much so that enemies of Manichaeism later accused the religion of offering little more than a mishmash of mixed messages. Mani himself said that God had sent several messengers to spread his words – Buddha to India, Zoroaster to Persia and Christ to Palestine – but that God had chosen him to combine the best qualities of each religion into a single doctrine.

King protected Mani

Mani had a reputation for healing, and legend had it that Mani cured a member

of the Persian royal family. The feat prompted Peroz, brother to the newly crowned king Shapur I, to grant Mani a letter of audience with the Persian Empire's new ruler. The document also granted Mani safe passage throughout the entire empire.

One day in 242 or 243, Mani was granted an audience with Shapur, whose empire had become so vast and powerful that even the invincible Romans feared his army. Rumours of Mani's ideas had already spread, and they suited Shapur's needs perfectly.

He needed a religious counterbalance to the Zoroastrian priests, who had usurped wealth and power and were now trying to influence the line of succession within the royal family. After his audience, Mani was granted a permanent place among the king's retinue with permission to preach his message.

"During my lifetime, no hand will be lifted against you," Shapur promised. While the king himself was not apparently converted, his youngest son and two of his brothers were.

Mani's time at court saw him at his most prolific, writing and illustrating seven or eight books, most of them in Syriac Aramaic. Mani had decided that his religion should be scriptural. He considered it a great mistake that Jesus had not written books but had only passed on his teachings orally. Because of this oversight, Christ's teachings had been lost or distorted.

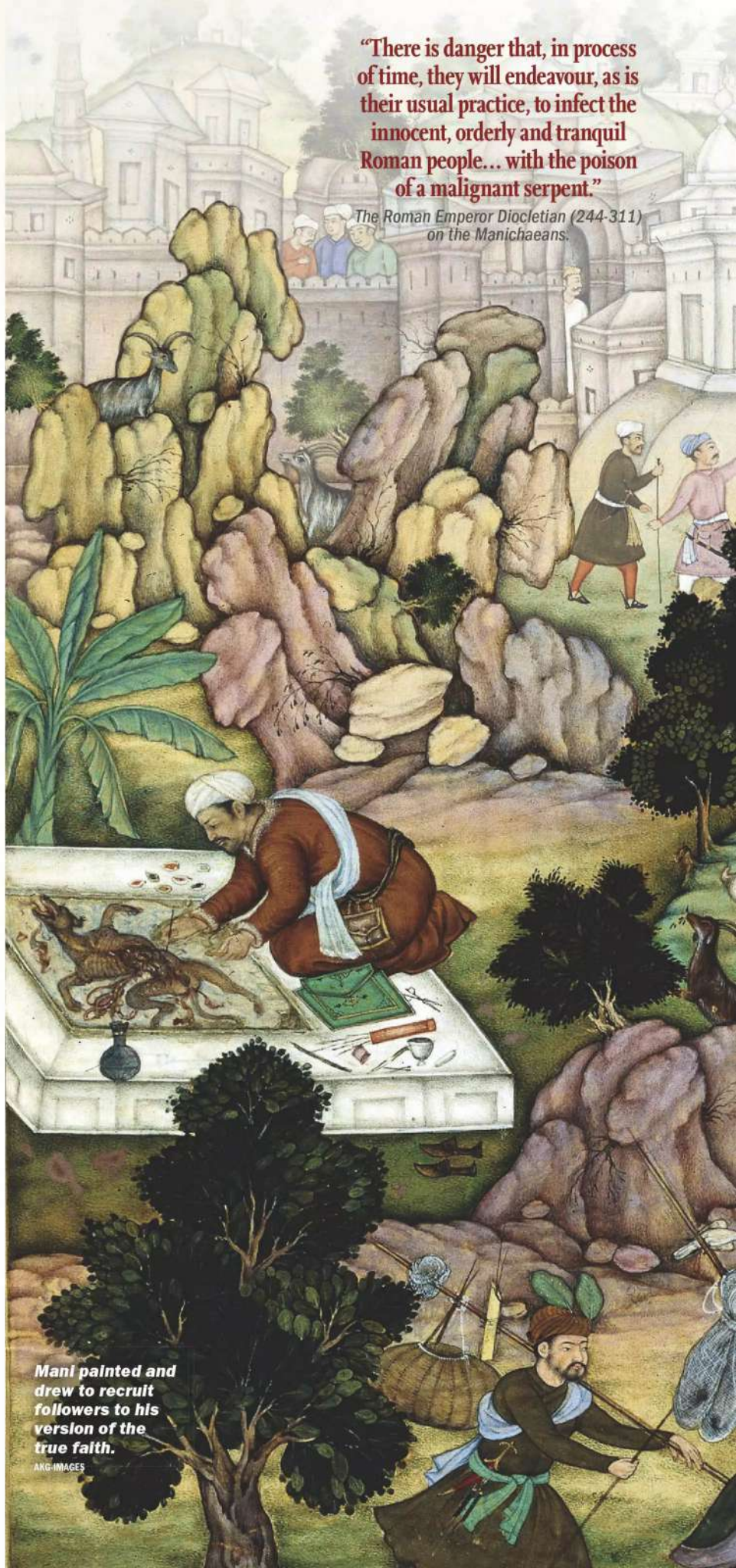
Enemies gained a foothold

Within their temples, the Zoroastrian priests gradually began to air their discontent. They feared that King Shapur's favour towards Mani threatened their own influence. Rumour had it that Mani had spoken against the Persian tradition of brother marrying sister, which Shapur himself had done. The warrior caste was also unhappy, as the soldiers had no faith in a prophet of peace like Mani, but rather in the Zoroastrian priests, who had always 'cleansed' conquered territories of demons and false gods. Soon the mood turned in their favour. Shapur challenged the Roman Empire's authority in the Middle East, prompting the Roman Emperor Valerian to take up arms with 70,000 legionaries in 260.

Mani followed on the heels of Shapur's campaigns, but in war, the advice of the aggressive Zoroastrian ►

"There is danger that, in process of time, they will endeavour, as is their usual practice, to infect the innocent, orderly and tranquil Roman people... with the poison of a malignant serpent."

The Roman Emperor Diocletian (244-311) on the Manichaeans.



Mani painted and drew to recruit followers to his version of the true faith.

AKG-IMAGES



In western China, German archaeologists have found fragments of Manichaean manuscripts from around the 12th century.

BRIDGEMAN

priests was more to the king's liking. Mani's influence declined sharply, and the Zoroastrians – in particular their high priest Kartir Hangirpe – became increasingly bold. Kartir now loudly accused not only the Manichaeans, but also the Buddhists and Christians, of being untrustworthy and traitors.

At Edessa in modern-day Turkey, the two armies clashed, resulting in a painful Roman defeat. The Romans lost all 70,000 legionaries, who were either killed or enslaved. Valerian was also captured – despite a promise of freedom. Scholars still debate whether the Roman historian Lactantius was correct when he claimed that Valerian was tortured to death. However, they all agree that the emperor died in captivity.

Mani was sentenced to death

Shapur died suddenly in 272. While his heir Hormizd was installed on the throne, Mani travelled around the country doing missionary work. The Manichaeans still felt safe, as the new king had always been one of Mani's followers. But Hormizd died within a year, and his brother Bahram was crowned king of

the Persians instead. Bahram had never been friendly to the Manichaeans, and under him, the high priest Kartir Hangirpe was finally allowed to go directly after the Manichaeans and Mani himself.

Mani was travelling towards present-day Armenia when a messenger from King Bahram caught up with him with the message that the king desired his presence at the court in Gundeshapur.

Mani's return brought great joy to the citizens of the city, as he had become an important figure. But in the throne room, the mood was hostile. Kartir Hangirpe presented Mani with a lengthy indictment, accusing him of being a secret Christian, opposing sister-brother marriages and the division of society into castes and classes.

Mani defended himself fiercely against the charges. But Bahram was the judge, and Mani's fate was sealed when the king impatiently interrupted him:

"You are not welcome! Tell me what good you have ever done our dynasty? You are of no use in war or the hunt!"

Mani asked what evil he had done and pointed out that he had demonstrated his ability as a healer – to which Bahram replied, referring to the deaths of his father and brother:



Mani was in Shapur's retinue when the king captured the Roman Emperor Valerian in what is now Syria.

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"You claim to be a physician and you have never cured anyone!"

Mani was then taken directly to a paved courtyard, shackled and put on display for public mockery and ridicule.

Sources suggest that as part of his punishment, Mani had to die as slowly as possible from starvation. He survived for 26 days. The executioners then drove a red-hot iron rod into him, skinned and dismembered his body and

"This man went out in order to destroy the world. Therefore we should destroy him first of all, before he carries out his plans."

King Bahram of Persia on Mani.

hung his body parts above the city gates.

Followers were persecuted

Despite the prophet's death, Mani's

followers continued to spread his teachings. But in the Persian Empire in particular, they faced fierce persecution. One by one, all six Manichaean leaders who succeeded Mani were killed by Persian kings.

By the late 200s, Manichaeism had reached Europe, but although their

numbers were relatively few, first the Romans and later the Christians persecuted them there too.

Over time, Manichaeism became an affront and an accusation levelled at Christian denominations that did not conform to church doctrine. For example, when the young Catholic Church executed its first heretic – Spanish Bishop Priscillian – in 385, he was found guilty of sorcery and Manichaeism.

During the fifth century, Manichaeism was wiped out in Europe, but the religion managed to keep a foothold in China until the 14th century. ■

Mani's religion flourished most in the East

Manichaeism never managed to become the official religion of a powerful state. Nevertheless, it reached large parts of the world.

Although Mani died in 276, his teachings spread rapidly, reaching Rome four years later. Manichaeans didn't find life any easier in the Roman Empire, however. They were persecuted and their writings burned because the Romans believed they were Persian spies. Conversely, the Persians considered the Manichaeans Christian traitors in the pay of Rome.

It wasn't until 644 that the Manichaeans were given a much-needed respite when Arab Muslims overran Persia and persecuted the Zoroastrians. For a time, the religion was popular among educated city dwellers, but fresh oppression from Muslim rulers forced them eastwards. In Central Asia – east of Persia –

Manichaeism flourished to its greatest extent. As early as the sixth century, Manichaeans were preaching in China and Tibet and were granted audiences at court. During the Chinese Tang Dynasty, several temples were even built in honour of Mani.

Manichaeism also achieved state religion status in the Uighur Khanate – a Turkic tribal confederation. The Uighur Khan converted to Manichaeism in 762 and built several monasteries in modern-day Turkmenistan.

The Khanate collapsed in 840, but Manichaeism persisted until the devastating Mongol invasions of the 13th century. It's here that some of the most important documents about the religion have been found.

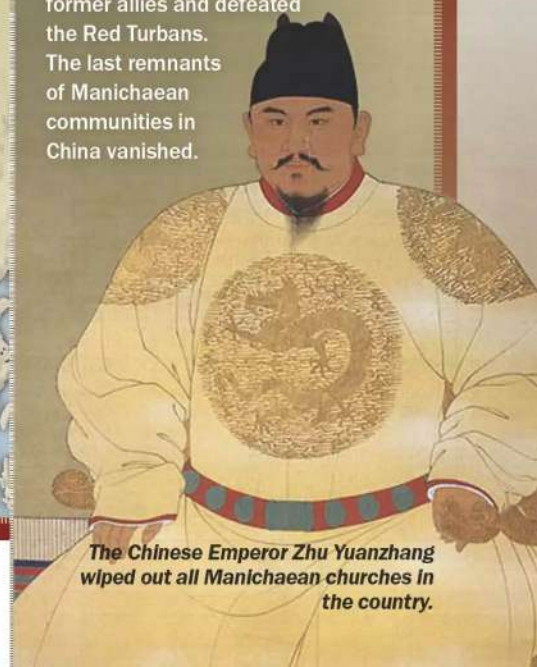
Manichaeans rebelled in China

Mani was not a subversive himself, but after his death, those in power in many places feared his followers – and in China, for good reason.

In the 14th century, Manichaeans played a leading role in a rebellion against the Yuan dynasty – established by the Mongols under Kublai Khan. In 1351, the rebels, known as the Red Turbans, planned an uprising, but before they could strike, their leader Han Shantong was captured and executed.


In 1359, the Red Turbans launched another uprising with General Zhu Yuanzhang, who took power in China in 1368. However, he soon turned on his former allies and defeated the Red Turbans. The last remnants of Manichaean communities in China vanished.


Manichaeism spreads (AD 240-1368)



The Chinese Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang wiped out all Manichaean churches in the country.

The Church's dark





**According to the Catholic Church,
Harry Potter is unhealthy reading.
Yet the Church's own story is not
for children either.**

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secrets

Assassination, torture, corruption and the concealment of important documents – the Catholic Church has used every means to protect and advance its cause over the years. The Church is the world's largest, oldest and wealthiest organisation, and the Pope's power has at times surpassed that of kings and emperors alike.

The sun was beaming through the window in the rectangular tower of Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh. The young Italian nobleman strolling around inside also felt good fortune shining on him during this beautiful spring day in March 1566. Only a few months had passed since he had arrived in this northern wilderness, and he had advanced rapidly within the court of Queen Mary Stuart of Scotland.

His wide eyes, fashionably trimmed goatee and dark, tanned skin had certainly helped to attract the queen's attention. But it was his beautiful bass voice that had secured him his first job as a singer at court. His fine northern Italian manners had further opened the doors of the court to him, and he had successfully ingratiated himself so much that he now served as Mary's private secretary.

Now David Rizzio could get on with the mission entrusted to him by "The Holy Alliance" – the Holy See's spy service – to gain access to the queen's secret papers so that the Pope could be constantly informed about the progress of the battle against the Reformation in England and Scotland.

Rizzio was also to support, help and protect the queen so that she could bring Scotland and then England back to the Catholic Church. He was the first agent of the Holy Alliance or "The Unity", as we know the Vatican's secret service today. Rizzio's fast-tracked career at Mary Stuart's court aroused suspicion and jealousy – it was rumoured that Rizzio not only entertained the Queen with his music, but that he was also her private bedfellow.

When English spies managed to uncover his connection to the Vatican, Rizzio's fate was all but sealed. On the evening of 15th March 1566, he was ambushed by a group of rebellious Scottish nobles – possibly orchestrated by the Queen's jealous husband, Lord



Italian nobleman David Rizzio was murdered with 56 stab wounds when the Scots discovered he was the Pope's spy at the court of Mary Stuart.

Darnley. The Italian was abducted in front of the heavily pregnant queen and stabbed to death with 56 knife blows in an adjoining room.

Church is a superpower

It may seem strange that the Catholic Church has its own spy network, but it is far more than just an ancient religion with purely spiritual interests.

It's actually the world's oldest existing organisation, and with the Pope at its head, the Church has often been by far the most powerful force in the world – far bigger than the richest and most powerful kings and emperors. Napoleon Bonaparte, for example, believed the Pope to have one of the most influential positions in the world, and should be treated "as though he had 200,000 men". Hitler was uncomfortable with the power of the Catholic Church and reportedly said the Pope's position was one of the most dangerous and delicate in international politics.

Throughout history, the Catholic Church and the Pope as God's representative on Earth has exclusively decided how the true faith in God should be worshipped and thus been the divine head of all Catholics. At the same time, the Church has functioned as a secular, political, diplomatic and military power. In both functions, the need to keep secrets quickly arises, and it's an

art that the Catholic Church has mastered over the centuries.

The papacy first became a secular power when Pope Zachary agreed to crown and anoint Pepin III, nicknamed 'the Short', as king of the Franks. Pepin's rival for the throne was fittingly confined in a monastery. In return for his help with the coronation, Pepin conquered land in Italy, which he gave to Zachary's successor, Stephen II. These landholdings led to the creation of the Papal States, elevating the pope to a major player in European politics.

The Vatican's long arm can be seen in major events in world history from the early Middle Ages to the Reformation. It continues through the French Revolution and both world wars to the Cold War and the fall of the Iron Curtain. To this day, you only need look at the list of high-ranking visitors to the Vatican to realise how much influence the Papal State still wields in world matters.

Pope's spy killed king

Back in the 16th century, the young Italian David Rizzio had a short career as a spy for the Pope, and the Vatican's ambitions to restore England and Scotland to the Catholic faith suffered an ignominious defeat when Queen Elizabeth I executed Mary Stuart. However, the Holy Alliance continued to work tirelessly behind the scenes to



The Pope condemned the Knights Templar in 1308. The order, established by the papacy, had become too strong and was exterminated.

promote Catholicism and the power of the Vatican as the centuries progressed. Who originated the Papal State's initial spy activities remains unknown, but the first organised spy service was almost certainly started by Pope Pius V (1566-1572).

It was he who sent David Rizzio to the Scottish court, and Pius continued his secret efforts to depose or kill Protestant kings and others until his death in 1572.

The work bore fruit almost 50 years after Rizzio's failure, when the fanatical Catholic assassin François Ravaillac carried out a daring assassination attempt on France's King Henry IV on 14th May 1610 on the orders of the Holy Alliance.

It was common knowledge that the king was planning a large-scale attack on the Catholic Holy Roman Empire when he was killed.

At the time, power struggles between the kingdoms of Europe were extremely intense, and with the Holy Roman Empire weakened by a succession dispute, a French attack could have seriously shifted the balance of power in favour of the Protestants. The assassination of the French king effectively put an end to this, just as the Pope intended.

Revolution took Church by surprise

If the assassination of Henry IV was a success for the papacy's spy network, the

French Revolution of 1789 represented one of its biggest failures.

The Pope's spies in France never foresaw the revolution, and neither spies nor papal diplomacy could mobilise a united European resistance to the revolution. The fiasco was complete when Napoleon conquered Rome in 1798 and proclaimed the city a republic. The Pope was taken to France as a prisoner, where he died, and the new

Pope, Pius VII, could only take up permanent residence in Rome again in 1814. This is the longest period in recent history that Rome has been without its Pope, but revolutions have not always been against the interests of the Church. In June 1979, the newly crowned Pope John Paul II travelled to his native Poland, where millions of Poles cheered him on. The following year, widespread strikes began across Poland, ▶

Innocent III was most powerful man in Europe

The most powerful Pope in history, Innocent III, outwardly supported the power of the kings in the early 13th century.

During his 18 years as Pope, Innocent III was able to launch no fewer than three crusades and is considered the most powerful Pope in history. Two of his crusades were directed against Muslims in the Holy Land, while the third was to fight heretics, the Albigensians, in southern France. Innocent concentrated Church power in Rome and at the same time guaranteed the supremacy of Europe's kings. For example, he overruled the Magna Carta, a collection of laws

from 1215 that limited the power of the English king. Behind the facade, however, he didn't take the supreme power of monarchs so seriously – for example, he was deeply involved in the struggle for the Holy Roman Empire's throne in the late 12th century. Popes with power aren't just historical relics, either. In 2010, Forbes ranked Benedict XVI fifth on its list of the world's most powerful people.

Pope Innocent III supported Francis of Assisi, who founded the Franciscan Order (also known as the "greyfriars").

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Papal States were a thank-you gift

The first Italian landholdings were given to the Pope by the king of the Franks, Pepin III. But Popes always had to fight hard to hold on to their territory until the Papal State was established and internationally recognised in 1929.

Eighth century The Frankish King Pepin III gives Pope Zachary several Byzantine territories around Rome and Ravenna. The Pope had helped Pepin to power and crowned him.

13th century Pope Innocent III expands the Holy See's possessions to include the Duchy of Spoleto and the area around Ancona in Italy.



1309 French-born Pope Clement V moves the Holy See to Avignon, losing control of the Church's Italian possessions in the process of doing so.

1417 Pope Martin V restores papal authority in Italy.

1798 In the wake of the French Revolution, Napoleon invades Italy, declares the country a republic and deposes the Pope. Pope Pius VI refuses to resign and is taken prisoner.



1815 At the Congress of Vienna, which aims to settle the political situation in Europe after the Napoleonic Wars, the Pope regains the Papal State's territories.

1870 After the creation of the modern Italian monarchy, the popes lose the Papal States piece by piece to the new state. Pope Pius IX declares himself a "prisoner in the Vatican", as all other land holdings have been taken from him.

1929 The Lateran Treaty between the papacy and the Italian state establishes Vatican City as an independent state in the centre of Rome.

particularly among shipyard workers at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, led by staunch Catholic Lech Walesa.

The Pope later stated that Walesa had been sent by God. But God was handily aided by Vatican agents with expert assistance from the CIA when Lech Walesa's free trade union, Solidarity, needed to organise.

The organisation of free trade unions in Poland was instrumental in the final fall of the Eastern Bloc in 1989 and is one of the most significant non-violent fingerprints of Vatican covert action.

Opus Dei will strengthen the church

The spy network is not the only organisation that has operated for the Catholic Church's cause over the years – others have also operated independently of local rulers and through similarly shady means.

The Knights Templar, founded in 1118 to support the crusaders in the Holy Land, was another such organisation. It was a warlike order of monks with the right to collect taxes and tithes. Over time, it became so rich and powerful that the Knights became a thorn in the side of both kings and popes, so in 1307, the French king condemned its members for heresy and the order's Grand Master was executed.

A more recent order is Opus Dei, founded in 1928 with the aim of strengthening the Catholic Church. The order has rules that are reminiscent of monastic practices, although most of its members lead normal family lives.

But the order's secret rituals and use of self-mutilation as part of their piety exercises have made it a prime target for conspiracy theories – especially after the publication of Dan Brown's famous bestseller *The Da Vinci Code*, in which the villain is a member of Opus Dei.

Pope toasted the Devil

Throughout history, countless popes have lost their lives in violent ways. But popes have not only been innocent victims, and the list of popes with immoral and even villainous histories is probably much longer than the list of murdered ones.

For centuries, popes were recruited from the 'spare' sons of noble and princely families. They weren't necessarily that pious, but simply wanted to hold a powerful position. Much of their behaviour wouldn't hold up to scrutiny, so the Church did its utmost to conceal their excesses so that their

public persona continued to appear flawless and exalted.

One of the popes who lived a life far from the pious and ecclesiastical ideals otherwise promoted by the Church was John XII, who was Pope from 955 to 963. One 18th-century critic of Catholicism based his description of John from accusations made by contemporary Bishop Liutprand of Cremona during the Pope's lifetime:

"John XII was worthy of being the rival of Elagabalus [Roman Emperor] ... a robber, a murderer, and incestuous person, unworthy to represent Christ upon the pontifical throne."

The list of accusations against John were extensive:

He was only 18 years old when he was installed as Pope, but he was already a known and infamous womaniser. His pursuit of women continued unabated after he had donned the papal robes – in short, John turned the papal palace into a brothel. During a synod in 963, several bishops and priests testified that the Pope had relationships with several women, including widows, his father's mistress and his own niece.

In addition, the witnesses said that John would willingly appoint anyone as a bishop if the payment offered was sufficient. He installed a 10-year-old boy as bishop in the Italian town of Todi and ordained another bishop among the animals in a stable. The Pope did not shy away from murder either. His own confessor was murdered by having his eyes gouged out and another priest at the papal court died after John personally castrated him.

In light of this, it seems unsurprising that several witnesses had seen the Pope cheerfully toasting the Devil himself and invoking Roman gods during dice games.

John XII fittingly ended his days in the arms of one of his countless mistresses, either from a heart attack or a head wound inflicted by a cuckolded husband, depending on the story told.

Villain was Pope three times

Another Pope who exhibited immoral behaviour during his papacy was Benedict IX, described by the contemporary monk St Peter Damian as a "demon from hell in the disguise of a priest". Yet Benedict was the only Pope to succeed to the papacy on no fewer than three separate occasions.

Benedict was first installed at the tender age of 12 in 1032. The young Pope's first term lasted until 1045, when

Knowledge kept hidden

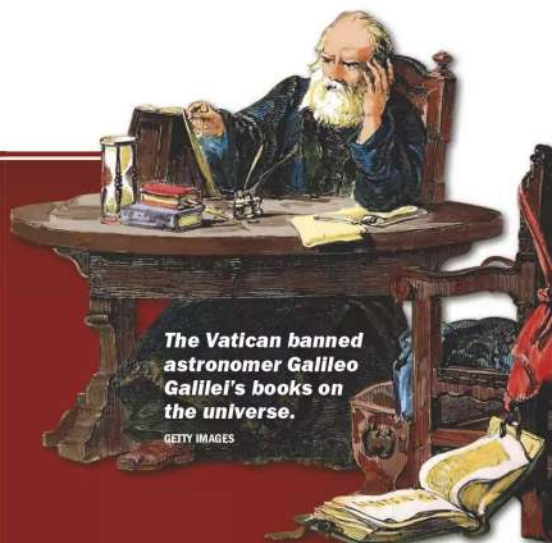
Over the years, the Vatican archives have stored secrets that could harm the Church if they became public knowledge. They include new discoveries, forgotten Bible texts and documents that revealed torture and persecution.

Mass murder in the name of God

■ Languedoc, France, 1184
The Inquisition was a papal tribunal that judged heretics and others who violated the laws of the Church. It first met in 1184 and became permanent a few years later, lasting until the mid-1800s. The punishment was often death, and the Church has thousands of lives on its conscience. The old case files, which include evidence of cruel torture, provide incriminating and damning material.



The French king, on behalf of the Pope, oversaw the execution of convicted heretics at the stake.



The Vatican banned astronomer Galileo Galilei's books on the universe.

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New knowledge banned

■ Florence, Italy, 1633
In the Vatican archives, there are several examples of the Church cracking down on ideas that challenged its teaching about the Earth as the centre of the universe. The astronomer Galileo believed that the Sun was the centre of the solar system. After threats, he was arrested and his books banned.

84 kilometres of shelves filled with letters, accounts and files fill the Vatican archives.



Dead Sea Scrolls threaten the Bible

■ Qumran, The Dead Sea, 1947
According to a popular myth, the Vatican keeps some of the Dead Sea Scrolls hidden. The scrolls, over 2,000 years old, were collected by a Jewish sect and found in a cave. The scrolls allegedly contain texts that could threaten the biblical story on which Christianity rests.

Pope helped Nazis

■ Rome, 1939-58
For centuries, the Papal State has hunted Jews with a hatred rooted in the story of Christ's crucifixion. Pope Pius XII had good relations with Germany, and his decision not to publicly denounce the Nazi extermination of the Jews has led to rumours that he supported Nazism financially. These rumours can only be dispelled when the archive for the period during World War II is opened.

Pope Pius XII may have been a Nazi sympathiser. He certainly never condemned any of their crimes.



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he was forced out of Rome by an angry mob who installed the more pious Sylvester III as Pope.

However, Sylvester only lasted a few months before Benedict was back with a large army to throw his rival out of the city gate. But shortly after he was reinstated, Benedict sold the papacy to his godfather (who became Pope Gregory VI) because he now wanted to get married. However, he quickly regretted

the deal and the very next year reconquered Rome and deposed Gregory, who was still considered Pope by the rest of the world.

With Sylvester III also still claiming the office, the situation was so messy that the Holy Roman Emperor Henry III stepped in, threw Benedict out, made Gregory renounce the office and installed Clement II. But when Clement II died the following year, Benedict returned ▶

with his army, captured the Lateran Palace and installed himself as Pope – again. The following year, the German army returned and threw Benedict out of the city for the last time.

A later Pope, Victor III, wrote of “his rapes, murders and other unspeakable acts of violence and sodomy. His life as a

pope was so vile, so foul, so execrable, that I shudder to think of it.”

Archive was closed off

The deeds and words of the popes have been extensively described, both by themselves and by the scribes of their time. The numerous accounts can be

found in the Vatican's secret archive. The archive was part of the Vatican Library until the 17th century, when the archive was separated from the library. Today, the archive is housed in warehouses built in the 1980s under the Vatican itself.

The library was established by Pope Nicholas V in 1448. He merged his

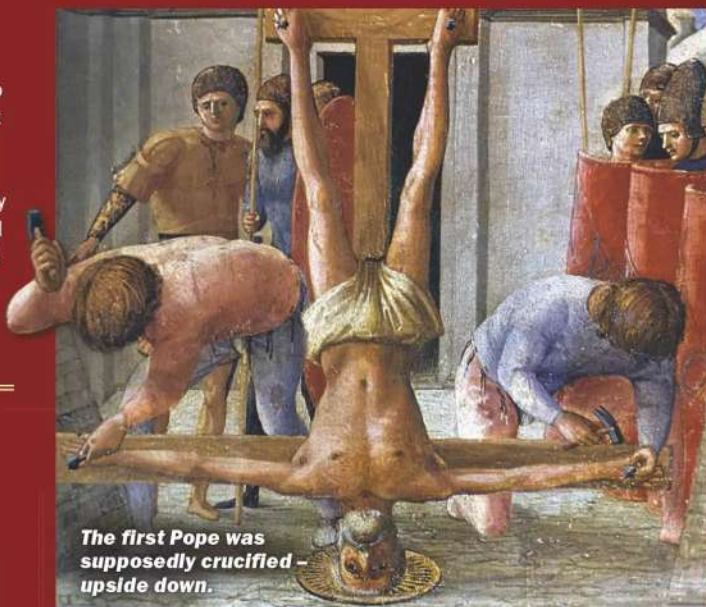
The Pope's job is deadly dangerous

The Pope not only has immense power; he is also at risk. The list of popes who have died under mysterious circumstances is long, and at least five popes were definitely murdered.

Peter **CRUCIFIED**

■ AD 32-67

The Apostle Peter was the first Pope and the first to suffer a violent death. According to the Bible, Christ chose Peter to start the Church and after Jesus's crucifixion, Peter travelled to Rome. Here he founded the Catholic Church, but the Church quickly became unpopular with the emperor, and in around 67, according to tradition, Emperor Nero sentenced Peter to death. Peter is said to have been crucified upside down at his own request because he did not feel worthy to die in the same way as Jesus.



The first Pope was supposedly crucified – upside down.

The list of popes with villainous histories is probably longer than the list of murdered ones.

John VIII **BEATEN TO DEATH**

■ 872-882

John VIII was such a weak leader it was rumoured he was actually a woman. Unable to defend Rome against a Saracen army, John was murdered – first poisoned, and when the poison didn't work, he was beaten to death.

Stephen VI **STRANGLED**

■ 896-897

Stephen VI exhumed the body of his predecessor, Formosus, and put it on trial. The corpse sat on a throne and a priest hidden behind the corpse spoke on Formosus's behalf. The verdict was “guilty” and the corpse had three fingers cut off and was thrown into the Tiber River. The scandal was so great that Stephen was later imprisoned and strangled.

John X **SUFFOCATED**

■ 914-928

John X's intrigues in politics had made powerful enemies. In 928, they gathered an army that defeated the Pope's brother and commander Peter in an attack on Rome. Peter was cut to pieces and John was smothered with a pillow.



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Benedict XI **POISONED**

■ 1303-1304

During his short tenure, Benedict XI managed to reverse his predecessor Boniface VIII's excommunication of the French King Philip the Fair. After only eight months as Pope, Benedict died suddenly in Perugia, allegedly poisoned by the local prince, Nogaret, who was furious at the influence Philip held over Benedict.

private collection with that of the Vatican, creating the most comprehensive archive of books of the time. In the first known inventory from 1481, there were over 3,500 works in the library. The archive is one of the world's most important collections of historical works – in 2005, there were over 75,000 manuscripts and 1.1 million printed books.

The secret archive contains official Vatican documents, including papal correspondence, treaties, bulls (papal letters with seals), account books and much more. It's estimated that the entire archive fills at least 84 kilometres of shelves with records, and the latest catalogue lists 35,000 volumes. The oldest known document in the archive is from the eighth century AD.

When Pope Paul V (Pope from 1605 to 1621) separated the archives from the library, outside access was also prohibited. Until 1881, the secret archives were closed to outsiders. Since 1881, they've been continuously open, and today, access is open to anyone with ties to recognised academic institutions. However, access only includes records up to and including Pope Pius XI's period as Pope from 1922-39. Documents from World War II onwards remain secret.

Rumours of pornography

The period the archive was closed gave rise to countless myths about its contents. One of them is that the archives contain the world's most comprehensive collection of pornography. However, there's nothing concrete to substantiate the rumour.

Others say that the archives contain the only texts that Christ himself wrote, namely an exchange of letters with King Abgar V of Edessa. An original text in Jesus's handwriting would undeniably be a scoop, but the letters almost certainly don't exist.

A third rumour, fuelled by Dan Brown's popular novels, is that the archive contains secret religious texts not included in the official Bible. These are supposedly writings that are in stark contrast to the Church's own interpretation of Christianity and, if published, would pull the rug out from under both the power of the Church and Christianity itself.

But the sheer number of people who've used the Vatican library and archives over the years and the massive corruption that has characterised the Vatican at times argues against such

NEO 75

Pope has world's oldest army

Founded in 1506, the military of the Papal State – the Swiss Guard – is the oldest army still in existence. The Guard has 130 men – all Swiss, unmarried Catholic men. They wear uniforms and weapons designed during the Renaissance.

- 1 The **helmet** is a Spanish morion, developed around 1520. The colour of the ostrich feather indicates the soldier's rank.
- 2 The chest, shoulders and upper arms are protected by **plate armour** known as cuirass.
- 3 **White gloves** are worn while on duty.
- 4 The **long halberd** is a medieval weapon for footmen. It was primarily used to pull a knight from his horse.
- 5 The **colours** are from the coats of arms of the Renaissance papal families, the Rovere and Medici.
- 6 **Stripes in contrasting colours** make it easy to distinguish your own soldiers from the enemy.



sensational documents being kept secret for century after century.

Fantasy novels are immoral reading

What is everywhere in the Vatican, however, are oceans of books, many of which have been subjected to persistent attempts at secrecy and suppression by the Vatican.

When Gutenberg invented printing, he also created the world's first mass media. The invention coincided with the first Protestant rebellions against the Holy See, and Luther quickly recognised the value of distributing text and ideas.

How were the Pope and the Church to ensure that orthodox Catholics did not encounter the new, dangerous ideas? These considerations led to the *index librorum prohibitorum* (index of forbidden books), which from the first edition in 1559, listed forbidden books. The penalty for violating the prohibition was excommunication from the Church.

The first index contained all books written by Martin Luther, John Calvin and other Protestant thinkers, but also translations of the Bible from Latin into other languages. Only the clergy were allowed to read and interpret the words of the Bible.

The last index was published in 1966, and the various editions of the index contain a veritable string of European scientists and writers. René Descartes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, François de Voltaire, Immanuel Kant and Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, have all ended up on

the blacklist at some point, along with writers such as Gustave Flaubert, Victor Hugo, Jonathan Swift, Émile Zola and Daniel Defoe.

One book that inexplicably never made the index is Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Another notable historical work not on the list of forbidden reading material for devout Catholics is Charles Darwin's thoughts on evolution in his book *Origin of Species*.

Although the last official index was published in 1966, this doesn't mean that the Catholic Church has stopped trying to influence the cultural habits of its flock.

In 2008, when film director Ron Howard wanted to film scenes for the adaptation of Dan Brown's second bestseller, *Angels and Demons*, the Vatican banned him from filming in any Roman church.

"It would be unacceptable to turn churches into film sets so that his blasphemous novels can be made into films in the name of business," said Archbishop Velasio de Paolis.

The Harry Potter fantasy series was also criticised for its "subtle seductions" that "deeply distort Christianity in the [young] soul" by the previous Pope, Benedict XVI, when he was still a cardinal in 2003. ■


50,000 BURNED AT THE STAKE

They had sex with the Devil, smeared themselves with fat from boiled infants and used black magic against innocent people. For centuries, witchcraft was the worst crime a woman could commit – and once accused, she was almost certain to end up in the flames.

EUROPE/1215-1782



In the 13th century, the Catholic Church felt threatened by heretics and saw enemies everywhere. It decided to crack down on heresy and soon fires were blazing under everyone from religious opponents to wise women.



*The majority of burned
witches confessed
only under torture.*

TIM CHEW, MHB

BY NATASJA BROSTRÖM & ANDREAS ABILDGAARD

For one last time, the executioner looked at the woman he had chained to a stake. Then he set his torch to the logs that had been placed beneath her bare feet. The flames quickly caught and soon the woman was screaming in pain.

Thick, black smoke billowed across the square in front of the courthouse in the German town of Fulda on that autumn day in 1603. The onlookers hesitantly backed away from the fire due to the heat as smoke and the stench of burning flesh spread. Eventually, the woman's screams died out. The heavily

pregnant Merga Bien was finally at peace.

In the square, Balthasar von Dernbach smiled with satisfaction. The abbot of Fulda had just begun his life's mission: burning as many witches as possible. The fact that Merga was pregnant and, according to the law, couldn't be executed didn't change a thing. The indictment stated that the child in her womb had been conceived with the Devil himself.

Merga Bien was just the start. Until his death three years later, von Dernbach subjected over 250 people to torture. They admitted to eating babies, poisoning cattle and taking part in ungodly nocturnal gatherings – the witches' sabbath – where they kissed the Devil's anus.

Fires were also lit from Hungary to Scotland, as the condemned's screams rose to the sky. In the 17th century, Europe was once again gripped by witch fever and the all-consuming flames were the only way to stop the evil women.

Wise women targeted

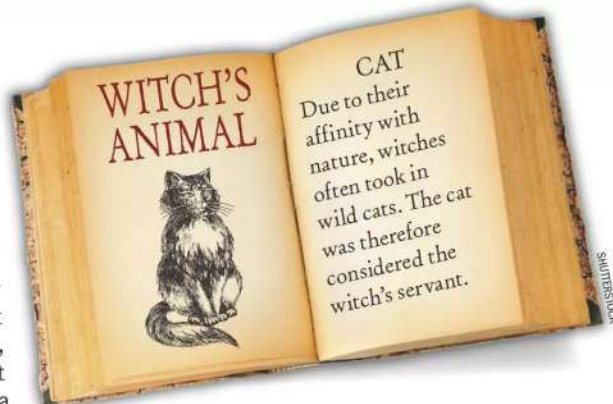
The notion of witches and witchcraft dates back long before the spread of

Witches could appease angry gods

The ancient world was ruled by capricious gods and evil spirits, against whom magic and incantations provided protection. This practice can be traced back to the Sumerian civilisation in what is now Iraq, 4,000 years ago. If a Sumerian felt threatened, he would go to a sorcerer who knew witchcraft and spells. There he had small clay statues or amulets made, covered with magical symbols that protected against evil. These were carried in a pocket, worn on a string around the neck or placed in the home to protect the occupants.

The Greeks and Romans also used witches to make amulets and perform rituals to invoke the favour of the gods. The Celts to the north also believed that witches and druids were connected to the spiritual world. These magicians could make medicines from herbs and predict the future by interpreting the position of the stars.

Celtic magicians were often midwives who assisted in childbirth.



Christianity and has its roots in popular superstition. In ancient cultures, witches and sorcerers had helped people with magic and knowledge about childbirth, but at the dawn of the Middle Ages, the picture was different: these wise women were met with fear and suspected of using magic for evil purposes.

Yet the Church – until well into the Middle Ages – had nothing but contempt for superstition. This can be seen in the *Canon Episcopi* from the 12th century, for example, which laid down how the Church courts should handle matters such as marriage, inheritance and adultery. Unlike these issues, there were no clear instructions on how to deal with witchcraft. It was to be regarded as the imagination of simple-minded folk, Church scholars stated in the legal text.

Until the 13th century, the Church therefore refused to take reports of witches seriously. Even though the Bible calls for the killing of witches in Exodus – “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” – talk of these women's magical abilities was something that proper Christians were supposed to dismiss as frivolous talk. Some rulers even condemned the lynching of witches. Among them was Hungary's King Coloman (1095-1116), who declared that witches “do not exist”.

But superstitions persisted. For example, peasants believed that witches triggered hailstorms that destroyed the harvest. In cities, alchemists, in their eagerness to turn lead into gold, risked being accused of making a pact with the Devil. Most under suspicion were wise women, who worked as midwives and cured disease with herbal remedies. With the help of the Devil, they brewed deadly potions, according to superstition.

The Church's resistance to popular superstition was not to last, however. Over the next century, indifference turned to panic.

Heretics fed the flames

In 1215, Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) convened the Fourth Council of the



Lateran, an ecclesiastical summit on the most pressing issue of the day: the pervasion of heresy in Europe. At the top of the list were the Cathars of France – a Christian sect that the Church considered heretical. Fear of the sect was so great that the council made a fateful decision: anyone accused of heresy would have to prove their innocence or they would be burned at the stake.

The decision had far-reaching consequences. Not only for the Cathars, but for all the men and women who in the following centuries were accused of practising magic or making pacts with the Devil. For the Church, these offences were tantamount to heresy and were also punishable by death.

To track down suspects, Pope Gregory IX (1227-1241) created a corps of heretic hunters – the Inquisition – in 1231. Gregory's agents were given free rein to find and burn heretics. Soon, alleged witches, sorcerers and Devil worshippers also came under the spotlight.

The situation was most hostile in Germany, where the inquisitor Konrad of Marburg saw suspects everywhere. Women and men, peasants and nobles – no one was safe when Konrad came to town. The inquisitor was so diligent in his work that after two years, the Archbishop of Mainz petitioned the Pope, complaining about the people's plight, writing that false confessions were accepted, but fair trials weren't.

However, the Pope backed his inquisitor and Konrad was able to continue his work, burning thousands of heretics in Mainz, Cologne and Trier.

It was only when the inquisitor accused Heinrich of Sayn, a count from the Rhineland, of participating in "satanic orgies" that things changed. A group of knights rounded up Konrad and his retinue on the highway and cut them all down. The perpetrators were never found, but the hunt for heretics in western Germany finally ended.

Widow had sex with demon

Despite the extensive efforts of the inquisitors, heresy seemingly refused to die out. In 1324, Bishop Ledrede in eastern Ireland made a monstrous discovery: his diocese was filled with "very many heretical sorceresses", as the bishop himself wrote in the minutes of a trial.

After being flogged, a maid admitted that her mistress, Alice Kyteler, led a group that cut up live animals at night and sacrificed them to a demon "from ►

Dead babies and sour milk were women's fault

Families and neighbours often accused each other of witchcraft, as it was tempting to blame others when something went wrong.

MILK TURNED SOUR

If the farmer's milk was sour or people fell ill after a meal, folks in the Middle Ages believed that a witch was at work. Typically, the accused were women, and many considered women's tasks such as milking and cooking to be easy ways to practise witchcraft, as they could add poison to milk or food, for example, when no one was looking.

BAD TEMPER WAS FATAL

According to indictments, witches often had a sharp tongue, a hot temper and a penchant for cursing. Such a cantankerous temperament often led to accusations. People who swore a lot were particularly at risk because it was believed that swearing could bring misfortune upon others.

MIDWIFE WAS GUILTY

The huge infant mortality rate of the time was often explained by witchcraft. In the German town of Dillingen, midwife Walpurga Hausmann was accused and convicted of killing 40 children in 1587. Similarly, in 1728, a Hungarian midwife was burned at the stake for allegedly baptising 200 children in the name of the Devil before they died. The children's souls were lost.

REVENGE KILLED ANIMALS

Dead animals could be a sign of witchcraft. In 1661, when a creditor came to collect a cow and an ox, Scottish Margaret Allan was so outraged that she killed the animals using black magic. Furthermore, according to the records, she subsequently deprived the creditor of "his wits".

WIDOW BECAME TOO GREEDY

Sudden illness was often used as a pretext for witchcraft accusations. In 1324, Irish Alice Kyteler was accused of witchcraft and Devil worship by her stepchildren when their father became terminally ill. According to the indictment, the 60-year-old Kyteler had already buried several men to get their fortune.

SINGLE WOMEN WERE OBSESSED WITH SEX

At the time, it was believed that women had a much greater sexual appetite than men. Widows and single women were therefore viewed with great suspicion because people thought they were chasing other women's husbands. In 1621, English Puritan Henry Burton wrote of old crows purring like lustful cats and needing a stallion.



Widows and single women were often suspected of being witches.

MAKESPECT

How to spot a witch

It was a well-known fact that witches were usually hideous and travelled in the company of a cat. If an accused woman denied being a witch, a series of tests could reveal if she was guilty.

WEIGHT TEST

DUTCH MADE MONEY FROM WEIGHING WOMEN

Thin women didn't weigh much, so found it easier to take off and fly to the sabbath, people believed. Women with little body fat were thus at risk of being accused. The Dutch town of Oudewater set up a weigh house where women sat on a special scale to test whether they were witches. Women who feared being accused of witchcraft travelled to the town to get a certificate to prove they were of normal weight.

WATER TEST

IF SUSPECT FLOATED, SHE WAS GUILTY

It was said that witches couldn't sink in water because they had renounced their baptism. An accused woman would therefore be tied up and thrown into water. If she floated to the top, she was a witch; if she sank to the bottom, it proved her innocence. This method was used in 1751 in England. An angry mob threw Ruth

Osborne into a pond. She survived the test and was hanged.

PRICK TEST

DEVIL MARKED HIS SERVANTS

When a witch made her pact with the Devil, it was sealed with the *stigma diabolicum* – a mark that the Devil made on the witch's body with his claw. A suspected witch was therefore often stripped naked so the executioner could prick her with an awl. The Devil's mark was numb, so if the pricks stopped hurting, he had found the mark.

TEAR TEST

TEARS OF PAIN COULD SECURE ACQUITTAL

If the accused shed no tears while she was tortured, people believed she was a witch. However, according to witch hunter Heinrich Kramer, this test was not always reliable, because the Devil could help the woman cry false tears. Science has since discovered that tear ducts function poorly when the body is in severe pain.

A sharp awl would reveal the witch's Devil mark, which was usually, in fact, a birthmark.

the depths of the underworld", as the report stated.

The 60-year-old Alice Kyteler had allegedly had sex with the demon and could use black magic to render men impotent. The magic rituals included putting hair from dead bodies into the skull of a decapitated robber. During the trial, it was also revealed that the group made potions from the boiled clothes and brains of unbaptised children.

Kyteler escaped to England, but the maid and the rest of the group were burned at the stake – convicted of heresy and sorcery. Europe's first recorded witchcraft trial had been settled.

As the Irish women fell prey to the flames, the priest reassured the crowd that the Bible itself decreed that execution was the proper punishment for witches. The instruction to "not suffer a witch to live" was being followed.

Old wives cooked children

The case sparked a wave of witch trials and the Inquisition got busy in Austria, Italy and Germany. In France, there were cases in major cities: Avignon (1335), Toulouse (1353) and Paris (1390).

The accused were usually women over the age of 50. They were flogged, a punishment normally used to punish hardened criminals, and denied sleep until they confessed to their crimes. In droves, the women admitted casting curses on neighbours and holding nightly seances in which they ate children, danced naked and invoked the Devil.

The many confessions shook the Church and theological scholarship; the

Devil apparently thrived unnoticed among good Christian people!

In 1398, the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris declared that witchcraft was tantamount to heresy and should be mercilessly persecuted.

News of the cases spread and increased people's fear of witches. The stories also created the classic image of a witch as an old woman who eats children and can change shape. In 1405,

SURE-FIRE SIGNS

Wrinkled like an old apple

A witch is usually old, wrinkled and hunched over.

Facial hair like a man

Witches have thick, bushy eyebrows and a noticeably hairy lip.

Wonky teeth

Their teeth are crooked and one of them always sticks out.

Bad eyes

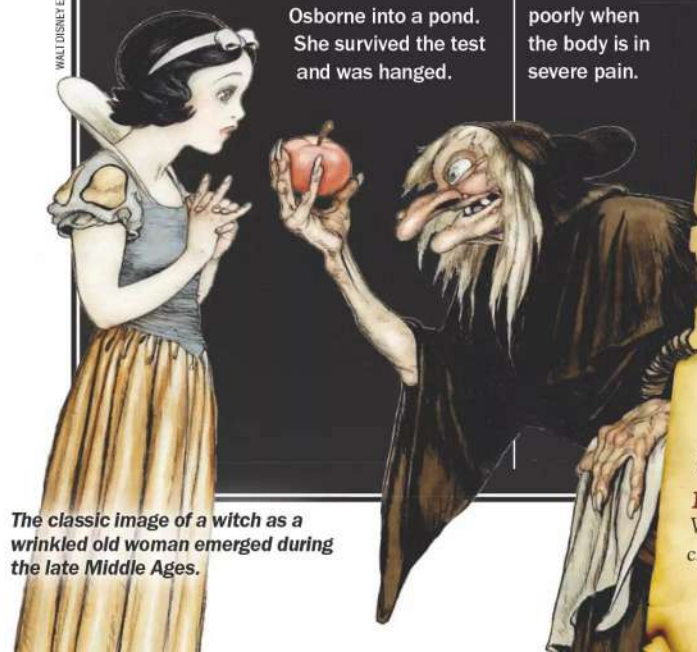
Witches have either milky-white, blind eyes or an evil, squinty eye.

Hideous voice

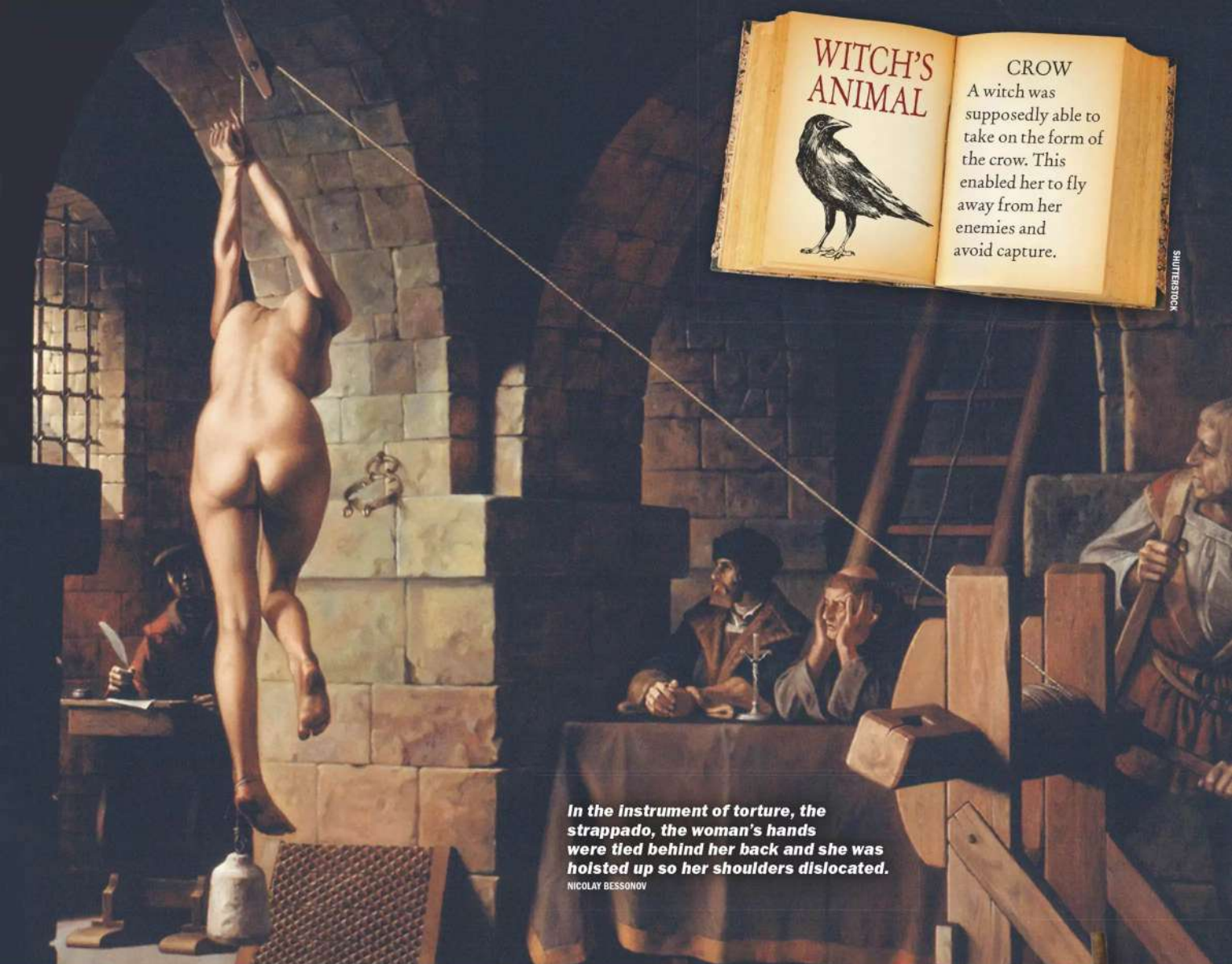
A witch's voice is either deep and hoarse or high and squeaky.

Demonic helper

Witches are accompanied by a dog or cat, which helps with black magic.



The classic image of a witch as a wrinkled old woman emerged during the late Middle Ages.



In the instrument of torture, the strappado, the woman's hands were tied behind her back and she was hoisted up so her shoulders dislocated.

NICOLAY BESSONOV

German theologian Nikolaus von Jauer wrote that demons could “assume bodies” of old women, and that in this guise they stole children at night, “tearing them and cooking them with fire”.

Such statements caused witch fever to flare up throughout Europe – for example, in the Swiss cities of Basel and Bern, and the German city of Freiburg, where a drought and the appearance of a comet, interpreted as a bad omen, prompted a decade of witch hunts (1395-1405).

Throughout the 15th century, the witch hunts continued. But they were not extensive enough, according to Cologne inquisitor Heinrich Kramer. In 1485, he became so angry at the courts' leniency that he launched his own crusade.

Women were lecherous

Kramer's anger was fuelled by a humiliating legal defeat in Innsbruck in 1485. During the trial of Helena Scheuberin, a merchant's wife, and 13

other women accused of witchcraft, the judge intervened and demanded Kramer explain why he kept digging into details of the accused's virginity and sexual past.

Kramer's defence was that “it is a general rule that all witches have been slaves from a young age to carnal lust”.

The judge rejected both explanation and accusation, but Kramer wrote a fiery defence of his views: “All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable ... They have slippery tongues ... [and] are intellectually like children.”

Two years after the defeat in Innsbruck, Kramer's writings were published as *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Witch's Hammer*). With Kramer's book, Europe's witch hunters had a common guide to how to recognise witches – by their lechery and sharp tongue, for example.

Europe had 26 million witches

Witch hunts flared up again in France, Switzerland, Germany and ►

1,000 Danish women burned

In Denmark, more than 1,000 women were burned as witches. The first burning was in Stege on Møn in 1540. It was the start of a more than 150-year hunt that ended when the last death sentence was passed in 1693. It cost 74-year-old Anne Palles from Falster her life. According to the prosecution, she had, among other things, “peed” misfortune into a bailiff's farm. Under torture, Anne confessed that she had met the Devil in the form of a cat and devoted herself to him.

The early end to the Danish witch trials was due to a royal ban on the use of torture before judgement. This made it impossible to torture a confession out of the women.



SHUTTERSTOCK

elsewhere. The most extensive hunts took place in the countryside and in areas characterised by political instability – for example, in the province of Béarn, which frequently changed hands between Spain and France. When everyday life was unpredictable, one bad harvest could trigger rumours of witches, blamed for everything from droughts to floods when crops were destroyed.

Fear of witches was so widespread that not even the religious divisions in the wake of Martin Luther's Reformation in 1517 could quell it. Countries that broke away from the Catholic Church may have rejected the Inquisition, but not the idea that the world was full of witches.

The Protestant principalities in Germany were given secular judges who now handled trials. In England, in 1563, parliament passed a law against "conjurations, enchantments and witchcraft", which stipulated that "if any person practise or exercise any invocations or conjurations of evil and wicked spirits or any witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery ... [they] shall suffer pain of death as a felon". Thus, it became standard procedure to hang witches as common criminals instead of burning them at the stake.

And there were lots to deal with. In 1571, France's Charles IX was horrified to hear a sorcerer reveal there were "more

than a hundred thousand in this realm".

According to French witch hunter Henry Boguet, there were 1.8 million witches in Europe, "everywhere, multiplying upon the earth even as worms in a garden", he claimed.

In 1569, German publisher Sigmund Feyerabend printed a book, *Theatrum Diabolorum*, with an inventory of all the Devil's plots. According to Feyerabend, Europe had 26 million witches. The figure was conjured out of thin air, but the idea scared the hell out of people. In 1580, the worst witch fever to date broke out in Europe, particularly in western Germany, where bonfires burned thousands of people.

Mob hanged suspects

The mass hysteria was most intense in an area south of Cologne in Germany. According to official records, one village was virtually emptied of life – out of 37 households, 32 women and 15 men were burned, while eight managed to escape. The lack of women caused families and entire communities to disintegrate.

"At this rate, there will soon be no women left in the town," Rottenburg town

council complained in 1585, after burning 20 women at the stake for witchcraft.

But the hysteria spread and people saw witches everywhere. If the authorities were slow to act, citizens were more than happy to take matters into their own hands. In Champagne in northern France, for example, a mob hanged 50 witches before the Archbishop of Reims could intervene.

The fear was fuelled by printed pamphlets with pictures of witches who triggered hailstorms and caused cows to drop dead. The hysteria led to 300 Scots being accused in a major trial in 1590-91. Similarly, French magistrate and witch hunter Nicholas Rémy revealed that he knew of 900 "capital trials" against witches and that it was all "actual fact, not a visionary dream".

By his reckoning, the feared witch hunter sent more than 800 witches to the stake before his retirement in 1592.

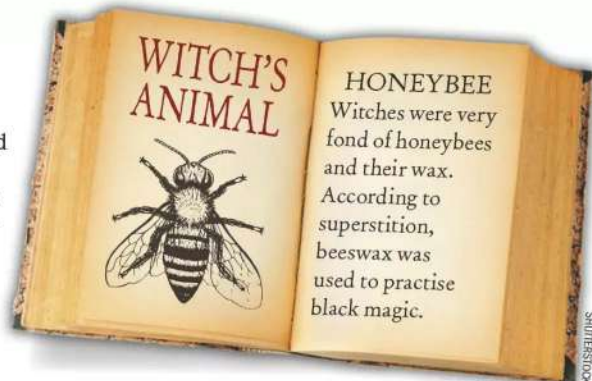
That high figure is not surprising: "[T]he judge must get the truth by every means that he can imagine," according to contemporary French jurist Jean Bodin.

Among the means were thumbscrews, placed on the accused's fingers and tightened until the bone snapped, wooden boots with internal metal spikes that drilled into the flesh, and the strappado, where the accused's hands were tied behind their back, before they were suspended by a rope attached to their wrists until their shoulders dislocated. After that, most people were willing to confess to anything. To stop the courts being overwhelmed with cases, many defendants were sent directly to the torture chamber to speed up the confessions.

Grandmother suspected of murder

The widespread use of torture – or even the threat of it – loosened tongues, and confessions quickly filled court records, as in Denmark, where 12 women were burned for hauntings and witchcraft in 1612, and in Sweden, where scores of women confessed to flying over "mountains and valleys" for a witches' sabbath.

Meanwhile, in the Basque Country, the Spanish Inquisition captured up to 7,000



Hallucinogens supposedly made flying possible

At midsummer, according to folklore, witches went into nature to gather herbs and berries. At that time of year, the dew was magical and enhanced the effects of the ingredients witches used in their ointments and potions. One of the most important was flying ointment, which supposedly made the witches take off. It is mentioned in a book by the German physician Johannes Hartlieb from 1456. The ointment

consisted of plants that were boiled in the fat of newborn children, and the recipe varied from witch to witch. It was said to be applied either under the

arms, on the broomstick or inserted into the vagina or anus.

It was believed that witches used a broom to apply flying ointment to the vagina.



INGREDIENTS

MADDER BERRIES (hallucinogenic)
WOLFSBANE (anaesthetic)
POPPY SEED (sedative)
THORN APPLE (hallucinogenic)
DEADLY NIGHTSHADE (hallucinogenic)
WORMWOOD (hallucinogenic)
TOAD SKIN (hallucinogenic)
HEMLOCK (muscle relaxant)
FAT FROM NEWBORN BABIES
FLY AGARIC (euphoriant)

Men also burned at stake

Twelve thousand men were executed for witchcraft. The so-called sorcerers were often accused of having political ambitions – and were punished in the same way as women.

Records show that women were most at risk of being labelled witches, but men were also persecuted – as sorcerers. However, according to the accusations, the goal of witchcraft differed between genders; women cast curses on their neighbours because they were angry with them, while men made pacts with the Devil to gain power and political influence.

When James VI of Scotland (1567-1625) brought home his Danish bride Princess Anne in 1590, storms nearly sank his ship. Convinced that magic was at work, the king launched an extensive hunt for witches and sorcerers. Among the accused were the Earl of Bothwell and a schoolmaster named Dr Fian. Along with 200 witches of both sexes, they were charged with making a pact with the Devil to kill the king so the Earl could take the Scottish throne.

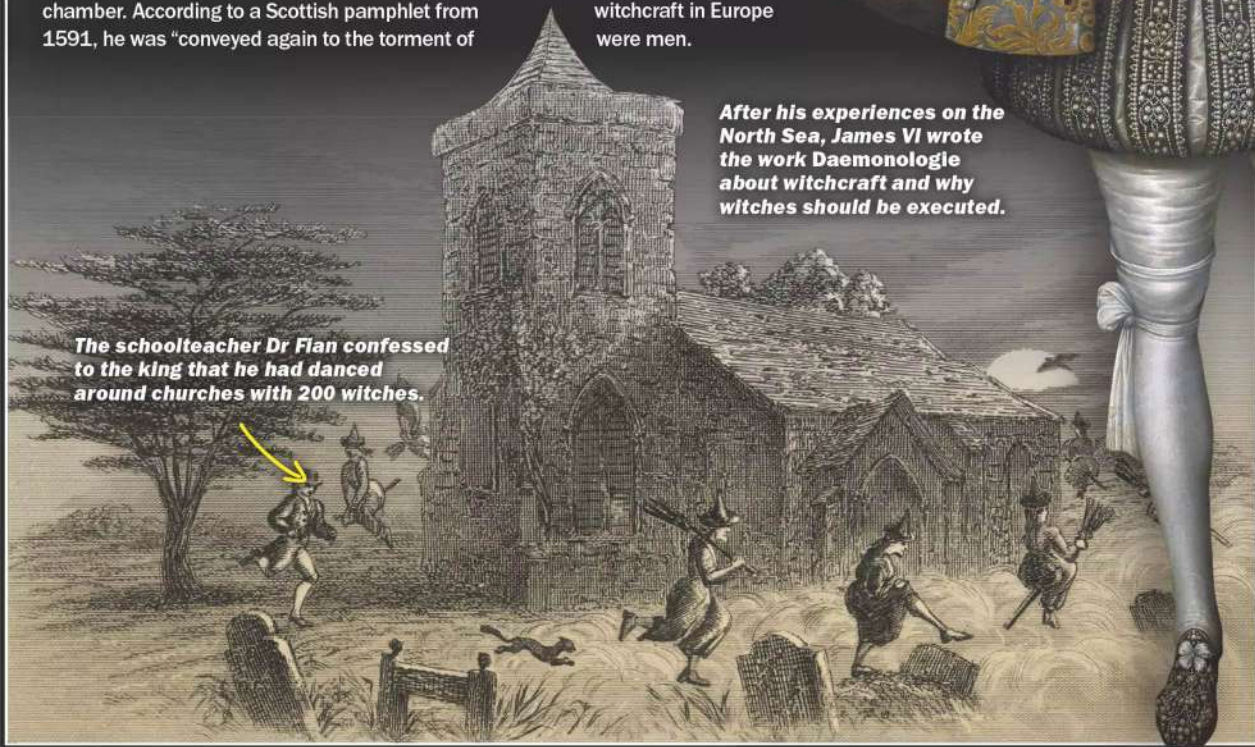
The plot sent Dr Fian, and others, to the torture chamber. According to a Scottish pamphlet from 1591, he was "conveyed again to the torment of

the boots, wherein he continued a long time, and did abide so many blows in them, that his legs were crushed and beaten together as small as might be; and the bones and flesh so bruised, that the blood and marrow spurted forth in great abundance".

The incident was not unique. In the Baltics, Iceland and Finland, accused men outnumbered women. From ancient times, magicians and shamans in these societies were men, and accusations of witchcraft were most often levelled at them. In Iceland, 92 per cent of the accused from 1625 to 1685 were men. Historians estimate that up to 25 per cent of the 50,000 executed for witchcraft in Europe were men.

After his experiences on the North Sea, James VI wrote the work *Daemonologie* about witchcraft and why witches should be executed.

The schoolteacher Dr Fian confessed to the king that he had danced around churches with 200 witches.



IMAGESELECT & PRADO MUSEUM

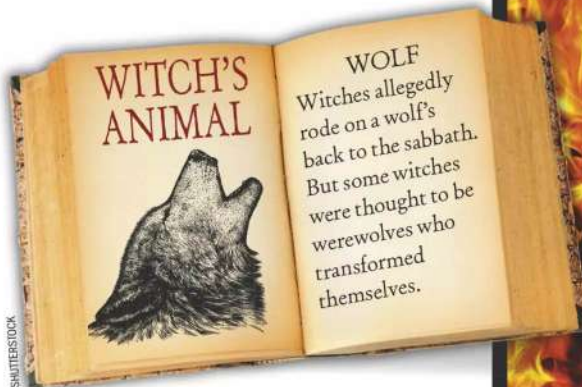
suspected witches. Hundreds were burned at the stake after confessing to worshipping the Devil at secret meetings. The killings continued until the inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frías complained: "Who can accept the following: that a person can frequently fly through the air and travel a hundred leagues in an hour;

that a woman can get out through a space not big enough for a fly?"

Frías's objections to the claims that witches could fly and pass through keyholes in the form of smoke helped end the persecution in northern Spain.

Instead, fears flared up elsewhere. In Steinthal, Alsace, panic ran rampant

between 1620 and 1630. Among the suspects was the widow Catharina Ringelsbach, accused of infanticide and witchcraft. One evening, she had given her grandson soup, which he ate "without indication of difficulty or sickness", according to the case report. Later that evening, the boy complained ►



of pain in his thigh, but she put him to bed. The next morning, he was dead.

When doctors examined the body, they found the boy's neck was broken. They discovered unexplained red and blue marks under his arms and a wound the size of a coin on his back. The judge was in no doubt: Catharina Ringelspach had brought the boy to an "unnatural death".

If the widow denied guilt, "with the help of torture the truth be brought out of her". After a trip to the strappado, the widow admitted to invoking the Devil and giving the boy poisonous herbs.

The report does not reveal the outcome of the trial. However, historians are in no doubt that Catharina Ringelspach ended her days at the stake.

Bonfires used too much wood

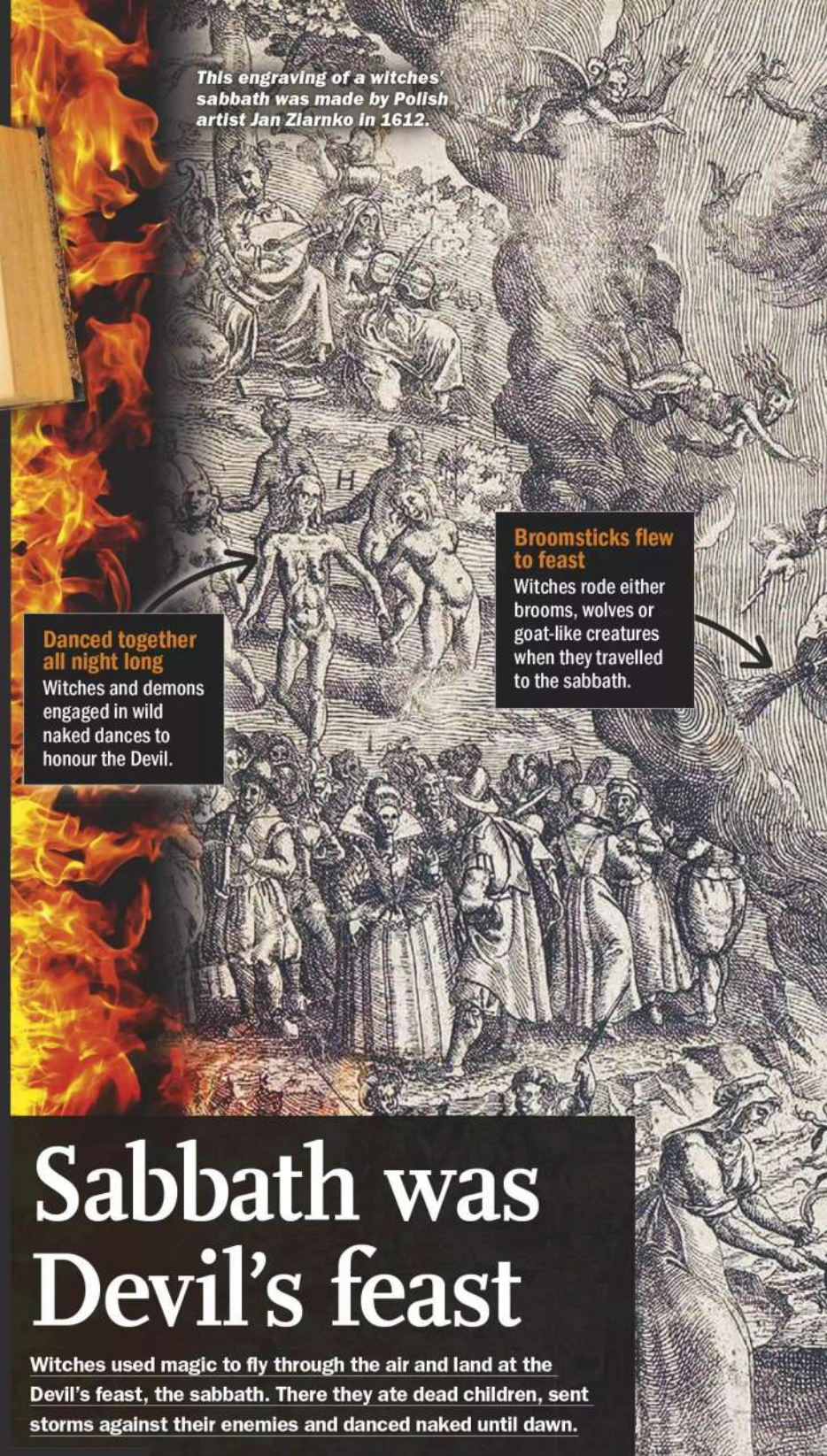
The fear of witches seemed unstoppable. In western Germany alone, over 1,500 people were burned in the early 17th century. The situation was no better further inland. In Würzburg, 1,200 ended up on the stake during the same period. When the inquisitor Cardinal Francesco Albizzi travelled from Rome to Cologne in 1636, he witnessed the madness:

"A horrid spectacle. Innumerable stakes had been erected outside the walls of several villages and towns, attached to which, poor and exceedingly pitiful women had, as witches, been devoured by the flames," the cardinal wrote.

The hunt was so intense that the German authorities encountered an unexpected problem – a shortage of wood. As the witches went up in smoke, entire regions were cleared of forests. In 1627, two villages south of Cologne refused to supply more wood for the fires, as they wouldn't have any fuel for the winter. One solution was special huts, into which the witches were crammed. The executioner set fire to the building and the witches were burned.

In 1645, witch fever spread across the Channel. Essex nobleman Matthew

This engraving of a witches sabbath was made by Polish artist Jan Złarnko in 1612.




Hopkins suspected that a group of women were meeting near his home to perform diabolical rituals. Hopkins had the women convicted of witchcraft and after his success, he gave himself the title Witchfinder General.

The nobleman was on the lookout for witches throughout Essex, and according

to the self-proclaimed witch hunter, pleas for help poured in from villages that believed themselves besieged by witches. Over 100 accused ended up on the stake.

Criticism of torture halted hunt

Not everyone was enthusiastic about Hopkins's work, however. "Every old



Evil one sat on a throne

Many witches confessed under torture that the Devil had appeared at the sabbath as a large black goat sitting on a throne. The goat was a pagan symbol of strength and virility.

Guests of honour flanked Devil

At the Devil's side were selected witches who had shown great loyalty to him by performing particularly evil deeds – such as killing children or poisoning a neighbour.

Innocent souls sacrificed

The Devil and his followers primarily sacrificed children because they had a strong, pure soul.

Children cooked and served up

Witches and demons feasted on dishes consisting of boiled and fried children's bodies.

Magic potion ensured misfortune

Witches prepared poisonous potions in large cauldrons and pots. The magical brews caused storms and spread disease.

woman with a wrinkled face, a furr'd brow, a hairy lip ... is not only suspected but pronounced for a witch," British pastor John Gaule sceptically remarked.

Criticism of the weak evidence and the "hideous torture", as German professor of moral theology Friedrich Spee called it, gradually gained

traction. In 1705, Halle jurist Christian Thomasius wrote that torture should be abolished. It was un-Christian and there was no evidence for it in the holy scriptures.

Gradually, torture disappeared from legal practice, in Scotland from 1709 and finally in France from 1788. Without the

ability to force confessions from the accused, the number of cases dropped and the fear of witches faded.

Europe's last official witch burning took place in Switzerland in 1782 – by then, however, at least 50,000 men and women had already lost their lives to the flames. ■

One god was not enough after all

The Bible states unequivocally that Christianity has only one God. Yet Catholics and Orthodox Christians venerate a multitude of demigods in the form of saints, believing that they can hear their prayers and put in a word with God on their behalf.

BY MARTIN LARDIN

The cult of saints emerged around the year 100, when European Christians began to honour the martyrs – fellow believers who lost their lives during the persecutions of Rome. The worship of religious heroes was not initiated by the church, but seems to have been inspired by an ancient Jewish tradition.

According to the believers, the saints – who were in heaven – could intercede with God on their behalf. This led to believers turning to the saints in their prayers, asking them to

urge God to help them – for example, by healing a loved one.

As exemplary individuals, the saints had made the ultimate sacrifice and had laid down their lives for their faith, thereby earning them a closer relationship with God.

In the fourth century, the veneration was expanded to include living saints who had dedicated their lives to Christ. However, as the number of saints exploded, the Vatican decided to take control. The first official saint was named by the Pope in 993, and in

1170, the Vatican issued a decree that only the Pope could name new saints.

In 1969, the Church further tightened its grip with a major purge of saints. Many were downgraded because there was no proof that the saint had ever existed outside of legends. According to official figures, 810 individuals are now deemed to have been officially sanctioned.

In 1983, John Paul II tightened the rules again. Any candidate for canonisation had to pass four steps before being proclaimed a saint.

Four steps to earn a place at God's side

The Catholic Church puts a potential saint through four demanding tests.

Step 1: Servant of God The candidate's life is examined by a bishop, whose investigation includes interviews with eyewitnesses and possibly an examination of the would-be saint's body. The bishop can then send a recommendation to the Vatican.

Step 2: Venerable Vatican officials forward the recommendation to the Pope, who declares the candidate "venerable".

Step 3: Blessed The Church requires proof of a miracle attributed to the candidate. However, martyrs can skip this step.

Step 4: Sainthood The Church demands proof of a second miracle. Once canonised, a saint must be celebrated everywhere, and churches should be erected in their name.



A candidate must perform two miracles to be declared a saint by the Pope.

St Ulrich is celebrated for improving discipline and morale among priests.

INTERFOTO

THE FIRST

Warrior bishop was canonised by Pope

Bishop Ulrich of Augsburg fearlessly went to war against an invading Hungarian army – and was named the first official saint.

Name: Ulrich of Augsburg (890-973)
Patron saint of fishermen and others

The Catholic Church's authority over canonisation remained marginal until 993, when Pope John XV proclaimed German Bishop Ulrich of Augsburg as the first official saint.

Ulrich assumed the bishopric of Augsburg at 33, immediately addressing the prevailing issue of the era: the physical and moral decay of the Church.

He spearheaded the restoration of dilapidated churches and monasteries, built new ones, and successfully reformed priestly education. Ulrich's exemplary

conduct played a crucial role in this revival; he strictly adhered to Church regulations, regularly visited priests in his parishes, and readily assisted at the local hospital.

Bishop defended his city

The indefatigable bishop also served as general for the defence of Augsburg during Hungarian incursions into the regions of Bavaria and Swabia in the 10th century. Despite lacking formal military training, he managed to withstand

the siege of Augsburg in 955 until reinforcements arrived.

Ulrich died in 973 from natural causes, having lived a life of exemplary Christian virtue that earned him the distinction of being the first individual ever canonised directly by a Pope.

*Did you know that...
Otto the Great was so impressed
by Ulrich's fighting spirit that he
authorised the bishop to issue coins?*

**Ulrich was among Emperor
Otto's most loyal allies – both
in times of war and peace.**

AKG IMAGES

Ulrich of Augsburg

Otto the Great



THE VIOLENT

Murderous thief became hero

Originally a slave, Moses harboured a fierce temper but chose to channel his anger to protect the Church.

Name: Moses the Black (330-405)

Patron saint of Africa

Moses the Black epitomised the archetype of a brawler. The tall and muscular Ethiopian slave possessed such a violent temper that when he fell under suspicion for robbery and murder, his Egyptian owner opted to release him rather than risk provoking his wrath.

Freed from his shackles, Moses decided to make a living doing what he did best: spreading fear and terror. Swiftly, he gathered a gang of 75 criminals who ruthlessly murdered and robbed their way through the Nile Valley in Egypt.

His fiery temperament was evident when a barking sheepdog caught him in the act of theft. Enraged, Moses returned the next day, knife clenched in his teeth, determined to seek vengeance on both the shepherd and the dog. However, the shepherd, alerted by the dog's bark, had fled. In a fit of rage, Moses slaughtered four of the man's sheep.

As the authorities closed in, he sought sanctuary in a Christian monastery. Despite

initial reluctance from the monks, they allowed the dark-skinned giant entry. During his time there, Moses became captivated by the piety of the monks and eventually joined their order.

Despite his new monastic life, Moses struggled to tame his explosive temper. When four thieves attempted to break into the monastery one night, Moses single-handedly confronted and defeated them, leaving them unrecognisable.

At the age of 75, Moses met his martyrdom when enemy soldiers attacked the monastery. While most of the monks fled, Moses chose to confront the invaders, ultimately sacrificing his life in the defence of his sanctuary.

*Did you know...
tourists can visit Moses's tomb in the
Paramos Monastery east of Cairo?*

**Moses the Black
gave up his life
as an outlaw and
became a monk.**

ART ARCHIVE/PICTURE DESK

THE REBEL

Roman priest defied the emperor's orders

Name: Valentine (died around AD 269)

Patron saint of lovers

According to the Nuremberg Chronicle of 1493, Valentine served as a priest in Rome during the reign of Emperor Claudius II. He was apprehended for clandestinely solemnising marriages among Christians, a grave transgression in second-century Rome, where married men were barred from military service. Claudius had the priest arrested, but was

sympathetic towards his devout captive – until Valentine tried to convert the emperor to Christianity.

Claudius ordered the priest executed by stoning and clubbing. Remarkably, Valentine survived, only to be beheaded on 14th February 269 at the execution site by the gate of the Via Flaminia.

*Did you know...
Valentine's Day is not a new thing?
Pope Gelasius I declared 14th
February as Valentine's Day in 469.*



THE EFFECTIVE

Honoured by Christians & Muslims

Name: Kosmas the Aetolian (c. 1714-1779)
Patron saint of missionaries

The journey to sainthood for the Greek monk Kosmas didn't begin with a divine revelation, but with a letter. It came from Seraphim II of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, instructing Kosmas to travel to Thrace to bolster the faith of local Christians, who were at risk of converting to Islam.

Kosmas embraced the task with zeal, establishing several church schools. Impressed by his effectiveness, the patriarch dispatched him to the Balkans, where crowds gathered to hear him preach. However, not everyone welcomed Kosmas's success; in August 1779, he was seized by Ottoman authorities and



Kosmas was such an effective missionary that the Ottoman rulers had him executed.

summarily executed in Albania, without trial. Despite this, the local Muslim ruler, Prince Ali Pasha, held Kosmas in high regard. In 1813, Pasha erected a church in Kolkondas to inter the monk's remains.

Did you know...

Saint Kosmas is one of the few saints in the Orthodox Church to be classed as the equal of Jesus's original Apostles?

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ANNIKION

THE REBORN

Textile heir tried to live like Jesus

Name: Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)
Patron saint of merchants

Canonisation can take centuries, but Saint Francis of Assisi was a saint in under two years.

Francis embarked on his path to sainthood in his youth, experiencing an epiphany that compelled him to emulate Jesus. He wholeheartedly embraced this calling, relinquishing his inheritance – a lucrative textile enterprise – and all his worldly possessions. Clad in rags, he traversed towns, preaching the Bible's doctrine of charity.

Francis's renunciation of his vast wealth was initially met with bewilderment in his home town

of Assisi, Italy, and led many to question his sanity. However, witnessing his newfound sense of liberation, many began to join him. Within a few years, the group burgeoned to such an extent that in 1210, Pope Innocent III formally recognised it as a monastic order. Thus, the Franciscan Order – now the largest monastic order in Christianity – was established.

Many of Francis's faithful followers compared the monk to Jesus.

AKG/SCANPIX



Did you know...

St Francis was the first to suffer stigmata – the same wounds that the Bible says Jesus suffered on the cross?

THE FLYER

Devoted but simple-minded monk lifted off the ground

Name: Joseph of Cupertino
(1603-63)

Patron saint of astronauts & pilots

Italian monk Joseph of Cupertino was incapable of reading or writing and was expelled from one monastery after another because of his limited attention span. His frequent ecstatic fits and aimless wanderings, with mouth agape, led his own mother to believe he was intellectually impaired.

However, the devout, hard-working monk persisted in his studies despite the increasing strength and frequency of his seizures. Eventually, he would fall into a trance at the mere mention of God or

Jesus, or upon hearing a hymn. Witnesses claim he once soared into the air during such an episode, and only came down when a superior shouted at him.

Seventy such flights reportedly occurred before Joseph was reported to the Inquisition on suspicion of witchcraft. After that, he was shuffled between monasteries for decades, until prosecutors decided his flights were manifestations of his profound faith.

Did you know...

The Californian city of Cupertino, where electronics giant Apple has its headquarters, is named after St Joseph?

Joseph's faith was so strong that he flew at the mere thought of God.

L. MAZZANTI

THE DANE

Stubborn missionary built Denmark's first church

Name: Ansgar (801-865)

Patron saint of Denmark and Sweden

The Benedictine monk Ansgar wasn't the first to try to spread the Christian message among the Danish Vikings. However, unlike his predecessors, Ansgar managed to convert a Danish king, Harald Klak, in 826. Ansgar's relationship with the king was no guarantee of success, however, as Klak was deposed a year after his baptism.

Klak's successor, Horik I, had little affection for the Christian Ansgar, forcing him to depart Denmark. Despite this setback, Ansgar ascended to become Archbishop of Hamburg. Meanwhile, political turmoil persisted in Denmark, culminating in the Vikings' ravaging of Hamburg in 845, which included the destruction of Ansgar's own

church. Undeterred by the setback, Ansgar remained resolute in his missionary efforts. Eventually, in 849, possibly under pressure from the Holy Roman Emperor Lothar I, Horik granted Ansgar permission to construct a church in Hedeby, a key trading hub at the time. This marked Christianity's first official foothold in pagan Denmark.

Did you know...

Ansgar is also considered the founder of the Church of Sweden?

A statue of Ansgar still stands in Hamburg, where he became archbishop in 849.



KMU

THE UNBREAKABLE

Tortured herself for 50 years

Young woman could smell other people's sin and practised self-mutilation for decades to save the dead from purgatory.

Name: Christina Mirabilis (1150-1224)
Patron saint of millers and others

When she was 21, Belgian shepherdess Christina endured a violent seizure that seemingly claimed her life. However, according to contemporary eyewitness accounts, at her funeral, she miraculously emerged from her coffin and ascended to the church ceiling. There, she lamented the stench of sin emanating from the confused mourners below.

Returning to the ground, she recounted her journey through Purgatory. The intense horrors she witnessed there made her vow to alleviate the suffering of souls by enduring their pain herself. She willingly

subjected herself to trials, such as entering fiery ovens, standing in ice-cold water for weeks, being attacked by dogs and throwing herself into spinning water mill wheels. She emerged unscathed from them all.

Some viewed her as deranged, others thought she was in direct communion with God. She shunned human company, claiming she could smell people's sins, and sought solace in trees or caves.

Despite her perilous lifestyle, Christina lived to the ripe old age of 74.



Christina is often depicted with a feather, symbolising her flight to the church ceiling.

MARY EVANS & SHUTTERSTOCK

Did you know...

Christina Mirabilis has never been formally canonised, but is still considered a saint among Catholics?

THE STEADFAST

Born-again knight was first Jesuit

Name: Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)
Patron saint of the Basques

During a battle in 1521, a cannonball shattered both legs of the knight Ignatius of Loyola. During his recuperation, Ignatius delved into accounts of saints, which sparked a profound transformation within him. He commenced praying for seven hours daily, preached to all who would listen, and immersed himself in religious texts.

However, Ignatius wanted more. He established a new order to enlist



Ignatius came from a noble family but chose the life of a monk.

members for the Catholic Church. The Jesuit order received papal recognition six years later and swiftly dispatched missionaries to every corner of the globe. Today, the Jesuits are one of the most influential Catholic monastic orders.

Did you know...

During his recovery from battle, Ignatius wanted to read chivalric novels, but the library only had religious books?

THE LATEST

Wait shortened for popular Pope

Name: Pope John Paul II (1920-2005)
Patron saint of families and others

"Santo subito!" ["Sainthood now!"] That was the cry echoing through the crowd at the funeral mass of Pope John Paul II in spring 2005. His successor, Pope Benedict XVI, seemed to agree; he opted to waive the compulsory five-year waiting period, initiating the nomination process in 2009. John Paul II was canonised in April 2014 before a gathering of over 500,000 people.

Cowl-clad builders

Piety and diligence made the Cistercian monks popular. Their immense churches sprang up all over Europe and made Gothic architecture famous, but the monks' success destroyed them. Within a few years, money corrupted their ascetic ideals.



Twenty-one monks built the first monastery in 12 years.

In 200 years, the monks built 700 monasteries.

The Cistercians spread Gothic architecture throughout Europe.

FRANCE/1098-1789

The year was 1098 and unrest was brewing in the Benedictine order. A group of ascetic and dedicated monks were tired of their lazy and gluttonous brethren. Under the leadership of Abbot Robert of Molesme, they founded a new order, the Cistercians.



St Benedict's writings on monastic life were the starting point for the Cistercian order.

BRIDGEMAN

BY NATASIA BROSTROM

The dark-robed monks gazed in horror at the wooded marsh south of Dijon. An unhealthy fog and huge swarms of mosquitoes obscured the weak spring sunshine, lending the area an eerie gloom. Was this really where they were to begin their life's work – the construction of a new monastery according to the strict rules of the monk and hermit St Benedict – the monks wondered?

A former Benedictine monk from England, Stephen Harding, looked expectantly at his abbot, Robert of Molesme. The old man nodded in satisfaction. The marsh was just the right spot.

Robert's dream met resistance

When Abbot Robert left the Benedictine monastery in Molesme in the French principality of Burgundy in 1098, along with 20 brothers, the 70-year-old knew that dreaming of a new monastery could cost him his soul's salvation – a

terrible punishment in the Middle Ages. Twice before, in 1072 and 1074, Robert had left the monastery to live with hermit monks in the forest. In Robert's opinion, the forest monks best lived up to the 600-year-old precepts of the Italian St Benedict about a frugal and ascetic life. When Robert ran away, the Archbishop of Dijon brought him back home by threatening him with the eternal torments of hell if he turned his back on God.

However, the strong-willed Robert refused to give up, because he was sick of monastic life. The Benedictine brothers in Molesme were lazy and did not live according to St Benedict's rules of self-sufficiency and austerity. Instead, they revelled in meat and wine, which corrupted the soul. The monks also enjoyed both property and money donated by Burgundy's pious nobility, and several brothers had adopted



GREATEST GOTHIC CATHEDRALS

Notre-Dame

Built from 1163 to 1345 in Paris, France. The cathedral is 128 m long and 90 m high. It has 10 bells; the largest weighs 13,271 kg.

SHUTTERSTOCK

shameful luxury practices, such as wearing warm underpants in winter.

It was time for this to end. With the founding of a new monastery in the marshland 20 kilometres south of Dijon, Robert's group of disgruntled monks wanted to found a new order true to St Benedict's rules. In 1098, the 21 monks rolled up their sleeves. They drained the marsh and cut down trees, using them to build workshops and huts to live in.

The Benedictines in Molesme were furious. They wanted their abbot back, as Robert was a religious superstar who attracted large donations. With the Pope's help, Robert was again forced back to Molesme, and a new abbot, Alberic, took over the construction of the monastery in the marsh.

When Alberic realised that the wet ground couldn't support a stone monastery, he asked the prince of Burgundy, Odo I, for help. He granted the monks a plain near the River Saône, and with solid ground under their feet, the small, determined group was ready to build their first monastery for what would become one of the most influential monastic orders of the Middle Ages: the Cistercians.

Hard work cost lives

Despite the monks' fervour and free supplies of stone from the Burgundian prince, building was slow. The monks had to follow St Benedict's rule of not accepting help, so hiring craftsmen, collecting tithes or accepting donations was out of the question. As a result, the older monks died due to the poor diet, hard construction work and life in damp huts. With no novices joining the project, the work became increasingly difficult for those who remained.

After ten years, only half of the original 21 monks were still alive and able to work. And the first part of the church, the chancel, wasn't even finished.

In 1109, Alberic died and Robert's old disciple Stephen Harding was

Cistercians took precepts from St Benedict

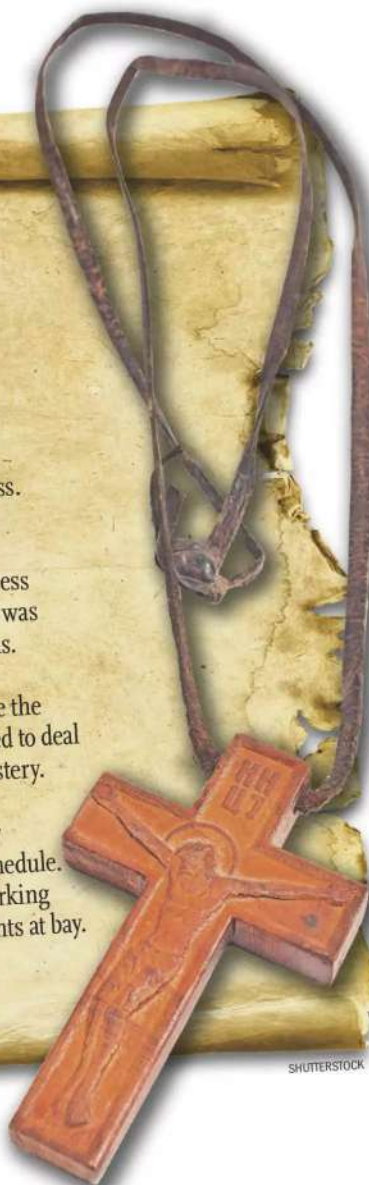
✚ **Dress:** A monk had to wear the simplest of clothes – a robe of scratchy, undyed wool. Tunics, fur and linen shirts were forbidden.

✚ **Bedding:** Cistercian monks had to spend the night in a dormitory on a straw mattress. Bed linen was not allowed in the room.

✚ **Property:** Monks were not allowed to possess any personal belongings. The prohibition was meant to force them to live in poverty like Jesus.

✚ **Isolation:** It was strictly forbidden to leave the monastery. Only lay brothers were allowed to deal with the outside world on behalf of the monastery.

✚ **Work and leisure:** The monk had to pray around the clock according to a fixed schedule. All other hours of the day had to be spent working and studying holy texts to keep sinful thoughts at bay.



SHUTTERSTOCK

installed as the new abbot. He soon realised that the monks' code of conduct had to be relaxed. Reluctantly, Stephen began accepting donations from the nobility – vineyards, farmland and farms with their peasants. The gifts provided the monks with labour and a surplus of food to sell in local markets. With the proceeds, Abbot Stephen was able to hire lay brothers from among Burgundy's peasants.

The lay brothers, who were not required to take monastic vows but simply to live in piety, got to work. Applicants flocked to the monastery. Life there was hard but safe, with food on the table and a roof over your head.

Stephen's efforts quickly showed results – and soon the construction site came back to life. Monks and lay brothers laboured side by side, sawing wood and hauling stones. Slowly, the walls of the church rose towards the sky and the monastery was given its name – Cîteaux – presumably after the site's old Roman name, Cistercium.

Monks did everything themselves

However, Abbot Stephen feared that close contact with the outside world and their new wealth could corrupt the monks. In 1110, he therefore wrote the *Exordium Parvum*, a code of conduct that was intended to curb all forms of debauchery among both monks and lay brothers.

The rules specified times for singing hymns and saying prayers, as well as how the monks were to "live off [the land] by his own work". Furthermore, they stipulated that monks should live in "places removed from populated areas" and that they should build the monastery's church, dormitories and workshops themselves. However, they were still allowed to receive gifts such as cattle, fields and forests.

Within a few years, the pious, hard-working builder monks of Cîteaux became known throughout France. Nobles vied to donate to the order in exchange for the brothers praying for their souls, so that at the end of their lives they would pass quickly through purgatory and into God's paradise. The most ardent sent their sons as novices

or even entered the order themselves. One was a young French nobleman who would change the Cistercian order for ever.

Fanatical nobleman

With his short stature and slight build, 23-year-old Bernard de Fontaine didn't look very impressive. But the nobleman's eyes glowed with eagerness as he stood in front of the gates of Cîteaux one spring day in 1113 and pleaded with Abbot Stephen to be admitted as a novice.

Bernard was ready to leave upper-class life behind, and to prove his sincerity, he pointed to his entourage of

30 Burgundian nobles – including his four brothers. All of them had been convinced to follow Bernard into monastic life. Impressed, Stephen welcomed the young man and his followers. With Bernard, new winds ►



Monks made European agriculture efficient

The Cistercians favoured large-scale farming and cross-fertilisation for the best crops. The results ensured the order's prosperity.

No one else in medieval Europe had farms as large and efficient as the Cistercian monks. The system was like a well-oiled industry, with flocks of up to 14,000 sheep, large fields and irrigated orchards and gardens. There, the monasteries' lay brothers worked all the hours of daylight, harvesting, shearing sheep and making wine.

The monks didn't shy away from using the emerging genetics knowledge

of the time, whether it was for animals or plants. They selected the tastiest grapes and created new varieties, and bred only the sheep that produced the best wool. The result was recognised wines such as Meursault and Moselle, as well as the best wool in Europe.

The monks also built market gardens where they grew particularly tasty vegetables that fetched good prices in the neighbouring marketplaces.

Lay brothers harvested grain in the fields, as the monks were not allowed to leave the monastery.

THE YORK PROJECT



swept through Cîteaux. He was fanatical about praying day and night, and weighed his food before each meal so that he did not eat more than the permitted 500 grams of bread per day. The young man lived on the edge of starvation to harden his body, often resulting in him having to lie down, shaking with fever.

News of the devout Bernard attracted even more novices, and after two years, the wooden barracks of Cîteaux were overflowing. Abbot Stephen and the other leading monks decided to build four new monasteries, one of which, in the neighbouring valley of Clairvaux, was entrusted to Bernard, who had been accepted into the order as a monk.

The 25-year-old newly appointed abbot approached the task with his usual zeal, studying every detail of St Benedict's ancient regulations for the construction of a monastery. Among

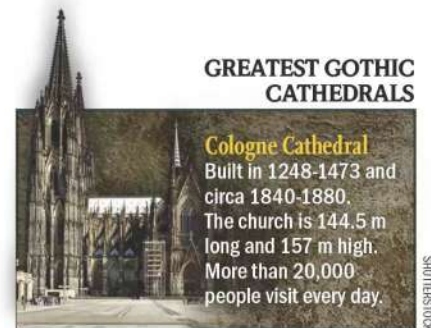
other things, the monastery was to be located near a river so that water could be channelled in and used in the kitchen and workshops and to power a watermill. The dormitory was to have no screens between the beds, and there was to be a central courtyard modelled on a Roman atrium. For Bernard, Clairvaux Abbey was to be St Benedict's ideal of humility and abstinence set in stone: clean lines, no ornamentation and a cruciform church with windows that let in God's light to bathe the bare walls in a golden glow. The sun's rays were decoration enough for a Cistercian.

But Stephen was not enthusiastic. Bernard's plans for an extensive building for hundreds of monks and lay brothers were, in his opinion, contrary to St Benedict's ideal of a simple, secluded life. Stephen feared that all the efforts to fulfil the Benedictine rules would come to nothing.

However, as the order's monasteries were administratively independent of each other, he could not put a stop to Bernard's ambitious building plans.

Strict rules guided construction

In 1115, work began at Clairvaux. The young abbot hired many people and over the 20 years of construction, an



GREATEST GOTHIC CATHEDRALS

Cologne Cathedral

Built in 1248-1473 and circa 1840-1880. The church is 144.5 m long and 157 m high. More than 20,000 people visit every day.

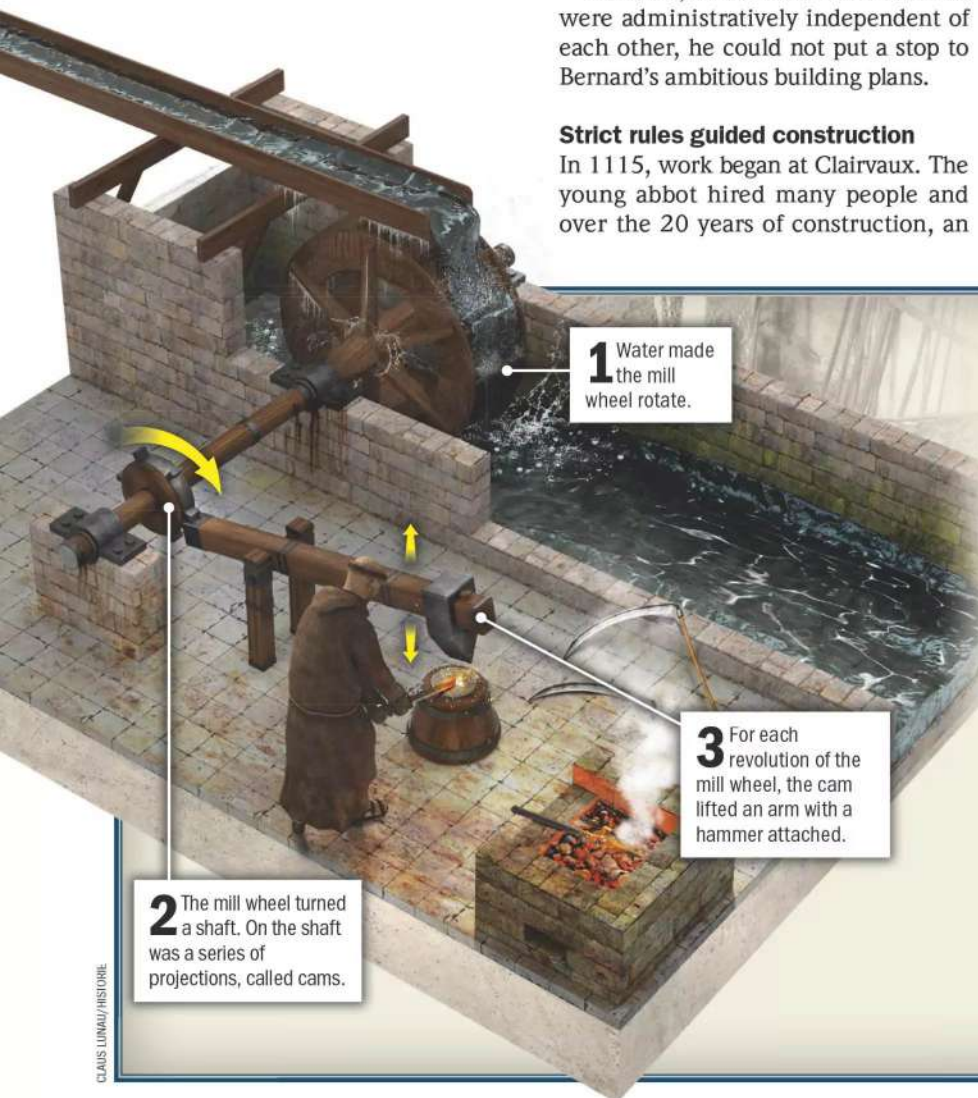
SHUTTERSTOCK

entire village grew up at the site. It was home to 800 monks and lay brothers, as well as servants paid through donations.

They helped with washing and cooking, while monks and lay brothers cut down trees and drained the area. Between daily masses and prayers, the brothers hauled stones from the local quarry, mixed mortar and fired the many bricks for the church.

However, the Cistercians were not yet professional craftsmen. So, against the order's rules, the young Abbot Bernard allowed a number of travelling journeymen masons to be hired to help the monks build the monastery with their plumb lines and protractors.

They also brought with them knowledge of the latest building style in medieval architecture – the Gothic cross vault. Bernard was excited because thanks to the cross vault, he could have a bright, high-ceilinged



1 Water made the mill wheel rotate.

2 The mill wheel turned a shaft. On the shaft was a series of projections, called cams.

3 For each revolution of the mill wheel, the cam lifted an arm with a hammer attached.

Monastery ran on water

No one since the Romans had used water power to the extent that the Cistercians did. In Scotland and Wales, water power was used in the order's mining operations. The monks had invented a camshaft that drove a large mechanical hammer to shape wrought iron. The invention spread to the rest of the order, including Fontenay Abbey in France. There, the monks produced some of Europe's finest metalwork, such as lead pipes and taps.

Without water to drive it, the camshaft was useless. The Cistercians therefore built their monasteries along streams that could drive a mill wheel and its attached camshaft.

church. The method was still in its infancy, but a craftsman who mastered it could use such vaults to make a room both wider and taller. This made it possible to add large windows that allowed lots of light into the church – just as Bernard dreamed.

The skilled masons were assisted by an experienced, older carpenter. He supervised the construction of the hoists, scaffolding and the supporting wooden structures for the building's vaults and arches. Only when he judged that the mortar between the stones had set could the wooden supports be removed.

The carpenters, masons and plumbers, responsible for channelling water from the river to the monastery, had to abide by the strict Benedictine rules: no superfluous details and only the best, most durable materials.

The same applied to the glazier's work. The church's windows were leaded as usual, but the glass had to be without colour or motif. The walls were not to be decorated either. According to Abbot Bernard, this kind of decoration and nonsense was completely superfluous:

"What place have obscene monkeys, savage lions, unnatural centaurs, manticores, striped tigers, battling knights or hunters sounding their horns? ... One would sooner read the sculptures than the books, and spend the whole day gawking at this wonderland rather than meditating on the law of God."

Vaulted style was big hit

The construction site didn't see much of Bernard, however, as the industrious abbot of Clairvaux was constantly on the move to intervene in all sorts of religious and secular matters. Among other things, he was a co-founder of the Knights Templar and in the 1130s he advised in the dispute between Popes Innocent and Anacletus, who fought for years for the seat of Rome.

With his religious guidance, Bernard was an international celebrity and the Cistercians became one of Europe's most influential orders. This popularity led to Clairvaux's Gothic style, which broke away from the low-ceilinged Romanesque churches, becoming fashionable with European rulers. From the 12th century onwards, nobles built cathedrals in the new style. ►

Strict hierarchy ruled monks' lives

The Cistercians spent all their time working hard and honouring God. A strict hierarchy ensured that no one was in doubt about their position.



MONASTERY LEADER

The abbot was responsible for spiritual, administrative and practical decisions.

BRIDGEMAN

ABBOT

MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

The prior was responsible for everyday life in the monastery and supervised the novices.

CORBIS / ALL OVER

PRIOR

MONKS

REGULAR MONKS

The monastery's monks were often former noblemen who had taken monastic vows.

GETTY IMAGES

GOD'S LABOURERS

The lay brothers came mainly from the peasantry. They did not have to take monastic vows and were allowed to drink beer and wine.

THE YORCK PROJECT

LAY BROTHERS

HOUSEHOLD

MONASTERY WORKERS

Older men, women and children helped with the monastery's housekeeping.

GETTY IMAGES

Vaulted ceiling was monks' masterpiece

In the 11th century, master builders experimented with new methods that would enable them to build higher than ever before – and the Cistercians were better at it than anyone else. The most important element of the new Gothic architecture was the high vaults, which allowed for the construction of huge, domed rooms. The skilful monks spread the building style throughout Europe.

1

Timber supported stone

Vaulted domes became the norm in church construction. The material was stone, but it couldn't support its own weight during construction. Therefore, it was necessary to first construct a wooden framework that supported the stones as they were placed.

CLAUS LUNAU/HISTORIE

4 Arches locked in place

Using the heavy keystone, the arches locked together to form a self-supporting structure.

5 Dome took shape

Once the arches were in place, the masons started on the dome. The bricks were laid simultaneously all the way round so the weight was evenly distributed.

3 Cross ribs laid

The stones that would form the arches – also known as cross ribs – were laid on the timber frame.

2

Walls were built

The type of stone used for construction depended on location. French monks used limestone, while the English mostly used red sandstone. In the Nordic countries, brick was most common.

9 Roof added
Finally, the building was given a pointed roof of wooden rafters and tiles.

6

Buttresses supported walls

The tall space meant that the weight of the roof structure was greater than ever, and could even push out the walls, causing the building to collapse. Therefore, buttresses were built against the outer walls to spread the weight and hold the walls in place.

Buttress

8 Wall was supported
Arches and pillars bore the weight of the dome and supported the wall.

7 Wooden frame removed
When the roof was finished, the wooden frame was taken down. The stones in the dome were self-supporting.

The Cistercian building code forbade the construction of towers. Over time, however, many monasteries ignored the ban.



The Cathedral of St Eulalia in Barcelona was built 1298-1420 and shows how the Gothic cross vault allowed tall, light-filled spaces.



Monasteries were built according to a fixed plan

During their heyday in the 12th and 13th centuries, the Cistercians built more than 700 almost identical monasteries. The floor plan was a copy of the Clairvaux monastery and ensured that the construction followed St Benedict's precepts. It also meant that monks could easily find their way around when they arrived at a new monastery.

A Church: the most important building. The Cistercians' was cruciform with a square chancel. **B Chapel:** used for prayer. **C Infirmary:** took care of illness and accidents. **D Latrine:** consisted of a board with a hole in it. Waste was thrown into the river. **E and F Dormitories:** communal sleeping spaces with straw mattresses for monks and lay brothers. **G Dining hall:** offered a spartan diet. When a monk finished his meal, he had to form a cross with stray breadcrumbs until everyone had finished. **H Chapter house:** for administration.



BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

Bernard was the man behind the Cistercians' use of the Gothic style.

CORBIS/ALL OVER

Unlike the Cistercian monasteries, these constantly grew in height, with huge, vaulted ceilings lifted high into the sky by soaring columns.

Large numbers of young men flocked to the monastery in Clairvaux, all with hopes of becoming a monk there. In 1135, the monastery needed to expand, but a larger church and dormitory were not enough. To keep up with the influx, the order's leadership, the General Chapter, had to approve a series of new monasteries at meetings in Cîteaux. By 1150, the order had built 322 monasteries across Europe. All of them were founded by monks who, like the humble Robert of Molesme, were ready to start over



Abbot Bernard's monastery in Clairvaux is still in use, although today its inmates are prisoners, not monks.

and build a new monastery off the beaten track.

With the increase in construction, the leadership had to decide what the new monasteries should look like.

Abbot Stephen had died in 1134, and without his voice, it was decided that Clairvaux was a model example of Cistercian architecture. The

collection of decrees known as the *Capitula* stated that the order's monasteries should all have a floor plan like Clairvaux's. The chancel should face east, with the central cloister on its right.

Neither buildings nor workshops were to be decorated. The chancel had to be square to emphasise the cruciform shape of the church, and towers were forbidden as they symbolised a vain striving towards God's heaven.

Over the next 200 years, more than 700 replicas of Clairvaux were built – from Lebanon to Denmark. Monasteries sprang up in the green landscapes of England, as well as in Spain after the Christian reconquest of the country. Wherever a monastery was built, it had

GREATEST GOTHIC CATHEDRALS

Santa Maria del Fiore

Built from 1296 to 1436 in Florence, Italy.

The cathedral is around 153 m long and 114.5 m high. Its brick dome is the largest in the world.



SHUTTERSTOCK

bare walls and colonnades, with the iconic cross vaults that let light flood in.

The choice of Clairvaux as the standard for the order's monasteries made it famous throughout Europe. Even high-ranking clerics were willing to give up their posts to live as monks there. Among them was the Danish Archbishop Eskil of Lund, who in 1177 gave up his see to work as a monk in Clairvaux. He lived there until his death four years later, when he was buried at the altar of the monastery's church.

Success destroyed monks

All seemed to be going well for the Cistercians – novices were flocking in, revenues were rising and the order's influence was growing – but their popularity had a fatal effect. After Bernard's death in 1153, the ideals began to crumble and over the following centuries, the order rotted from within.

The Cistercians were a force to be reckoned with, but not just in a religious sense. Titles and positions rained down on their members. In 1209, for example, the abbot of Cîteaux, Arnaud Amalric, was commander of the Catholic army during the hunt for heretical Cathars in western France. When a group of Cathars entrenched themselves in the church of Béziers, the abbot urged his soldiers to kill them all without mercy.

"Kill them. The Lord knows those that are his own," was his harsh advice.

In addition to power, the order also grew wealthy thanks to donations and efficient farming methods. Many abbots became so greedy that they ran their farms as industries that made a fortune from the sale of grain and cattle. The order's English monasteries were also the largest wool producers of the time.

With riches came the desire to earn even more. Between 1272 and 1317, instead of waiting for the money from the sale of their wool, the English monasteries of Rievaulx, Kirkstall and Flaxley took out huge loans secured on the following year's wool production. When disease struck among the sheep, the monasteries couldn't honour their debts and had to be placed under the order's administration.

War and destruction divided the order

In 1337, the Hundred Years' War swept across France. The connection between individual monasteries and the base in Cîteaux was broken. By the time the

war ended in 1453, the order was no longer a streamlined organisation.

Monasteries in western Europe had towers and facades adorned with rosettes, dragons and saints. In southern and eastern Europe, onion domes and coloured glass dominated, and fireplaces crept into the dormitories.

The problems in the order also meant a loss of independence. Several monasteries had an abbot appointed by the local prince, often not even a cleric. The new abbots sucked all the value

out of their new possessions and spent the money on material luxuries.

By the Reformation in 1517, the order was on the brink of bankruptcy. Monasteries fell into disrepair or were demolished and stripped of their stone. When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, hordes of armed peasants turned on the monasteries, including Cîteaux, and plundered their riches. Soon only ruins remained of Robert of Molesme's dream of an ascetic life in a humble, remote dwelling. ■

Order survived wars and corruption

The Cistercians are far from their former glory, both in terms of numbers and financial prowess. But the order still has members all over the world.

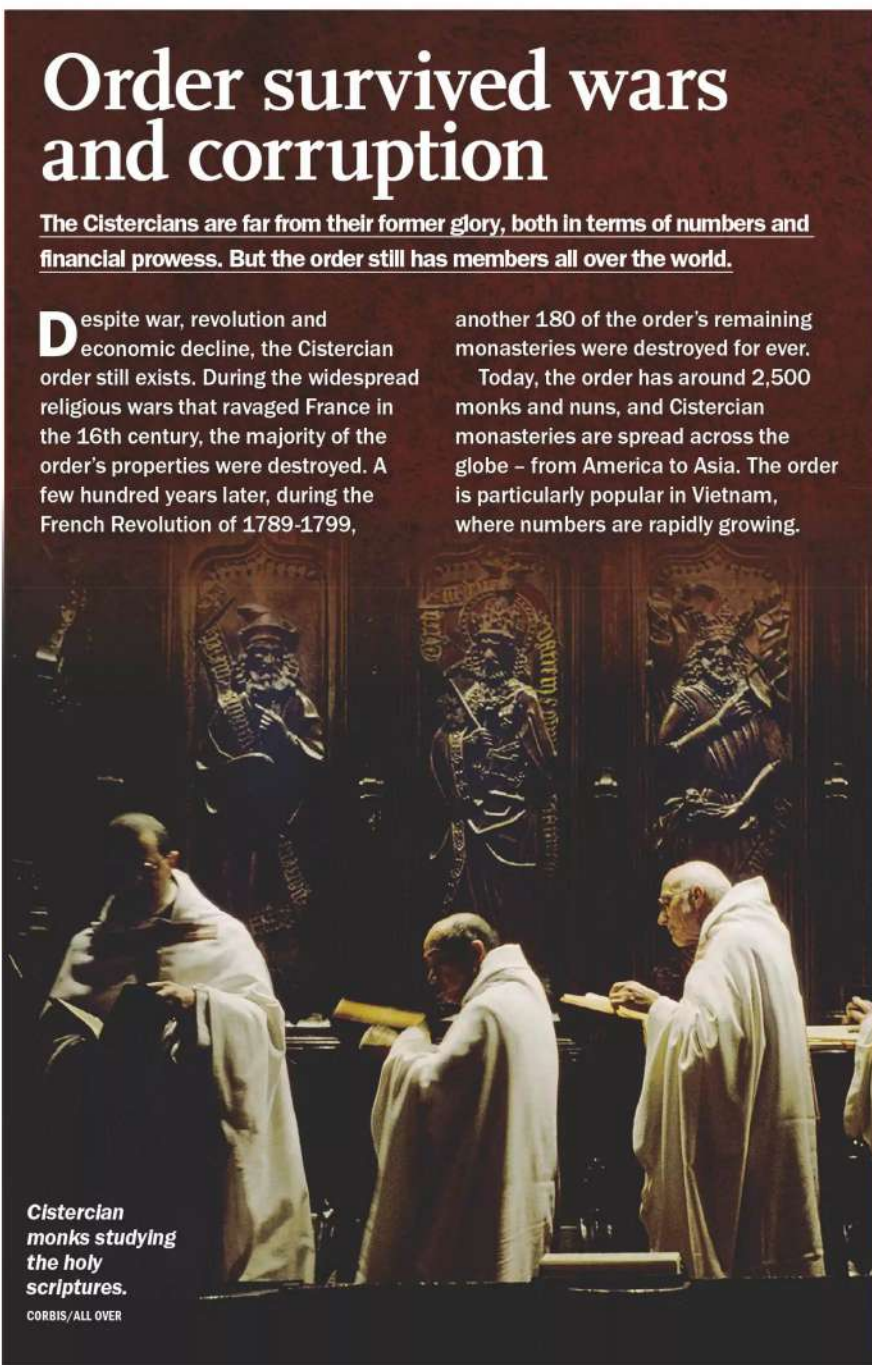
Despite war, revolution and economic decline, the Cistercian order still exists. During the widespread religious wars that ravaged France in the 16th century, the majority of the order's properties were destroyed. A few hundred years later, during the French Revolution of 1789-1799,

another 180 of the order's remaining monasteries were destroyed for ever.

Today, the order has around 2,500 monks and nuns, and Cistercian monasteries are spread across the globe – from America to Asia. The order is particularly popular in Vietnam, where numbers are rapidly growing.

Cistercian monks studying the holy scriptures.

CORBIS/ALL OVER



A riddle from the Middle Ages:

Who wrote the Devil's Bible?

For centuries, a colossal Bible featuring a Devil portrait has captivated all who beheld it. The book was stolen, nearly burned, and even came close to killing when it fell on a man. Scholars have examined the handwriting and specialist ink to try and identify its author, but puzzles still remain.

BOHEMIA/1200s



The printing press had yet to be invented, so the only way to make books was by hand. The Benedictine Order specialised in producing manuscripts, and in their scriptoria, monks copied thousands of texts.



The giant Codex Gigas Bible weighs 75 kg and contains 310 parchment pages. It's on display in the National Library of Sweden.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SWEDEN & SHUTTERSTOCK

The monk in a brown robe knelt down in a dark cell in a monastery in Bohemia (modern-day Czech Republic). He'd been caught committing a sin and now awaited his punishment from the monastery's abbot. The monk had dedicated his life to God and sworn poverty, celibacy and complete obedience to the Lord and the Benedictine Order. His sin was so grave that it could not be mentioned. The sentence would be equally severe: solitary confinement, during which hunger, thirst and the wrath of God would slowly kill him.

So began the legend of the Bohemian giant Bible – a story that has been retold since the 13th century.

The monk was terrified and begged for his life, the tale continues. If the monastery spared him, he vowed to atone for his sins by producing a Bible larger than any other in the world, and he promised to complete it in a single night. The abbot decided to let the monk try. All night the sinner laboured by candlelight. He wrote page after page, but the work progressed too slowly. In

desperation, he called on the only being who could help him:

Satan himself. The Devil responded – he would finish the book for him.

But only for a high price: it would cost the monk his soul.

Of course, the giant Bible was neither written by the Devil nor by a monk in a single night. But since the book exists, the question is inevitable: Who did write it?

Almost a metre high

The name of the giant Bible is *Codex Gigas*, which simply means "Big Book" in Latin.

The name is no understatement, as it's the largest known manuscript from the Middle Ages. *Codex Gigas* measures approximately 50 cm by 92 cm and weighs almost 75 kg with 310 pages of parchment. Two people are required to carry it.

The myth claims the *Codex Gigas* was created in a Bohemian monastery, and the manuscript's contents suggest this is true. First, it contains the chronicle *Chronica Boemorum* by Cosmas of Prague (1045-1125), which deals with the history of the Bohemian people. Second, the book contains a Christian calendar with a focus on listing the dates of death for Bohemian saints.

In addition, a note on the manuscript's first page states that the original owners

of the *Codex Gigas* was the Benedictine monastery in Podlažice, located in Bohemia. However, the manuscript was not necessarily written at the relatively small and poor monastery.

The note is dated 1296, but the calendar in the book ends somewhere between 1223 and 1230. The *Codex Gigas* must therefore have been written within this earlier period – around 800 years ago.

Handwriting reveals the monk

Legend has it that the book was written by a single monk with the help of the Devil. Scholars have found no evidence of the latter, but an analysis of the handwriting shows that it's consistent across all 310 pages.

Uniformity is not unusual for medieval manuscripts, as the monks who collaborated to copy texts were trained in the same location and in the same style. What is remarkable about the writing in

Codex Gigas, however, is that it is very rough and unrefined, as if the scribe had no formal training but was possibly self-taught. Such a style cannot be imitated by several different scribes, so the many pages were probably

created by just one person.

A UV analysis of the ink supports this hypothesis. Medieval monks created their own ink, which consisted of a mixture of oak gall extract, tannic acid and iron sulphate. Each monk had his own mixing ratio, and the UV analysis shows that all the ink in *Codex Gigas* was made using the same formula.

Steady work for 10 years

Myth and truth part ways when it comes to time. The giant Bible could not possibly have been written in a single night.

A medieval scribe working with quill and parchment could only write at a certain speed if the text was to be legible. Modern-day researchers have ▶

"A great book... [one of] the seven wonders of the world because of its immensity".

A Benedictine monk, 1296

Holy incantations

Priests and monks could read incantations from the *Codex Gigas* to cure the sick who were possessed by the Devil and his demons.

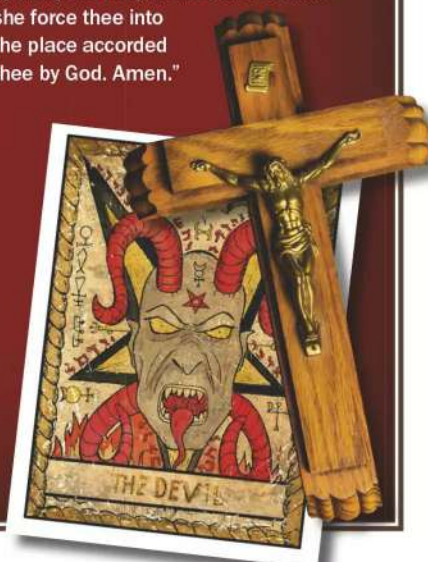
In the Middle Ages, it was commonly believed that some diseases occurred because the Devil or one of his demons had possessed the sick person. Along with its medical encyclopaedia, the *Codex Gigas* contains a chapter on incantations that were used to expel diseases from the body.

The exorcism could only be performed by a monk or priest with extraordinary faith as he had to fight against powerful forces. First the disease or the demon causing it was invoked by name and then commanded to leave the patient using the names of holy persons, such as:

"Dino [demon, Ed], savage thou art in truth and savage through and through. For extended thou art through all human limbs like a yearling lamb in the home. Dino, thou hast sworn and sworn falsely 100 times over. 100 times more insanely permitted, entered through

all human limbs. Thou shalt not have power from thy place but shall sleep as a yearling lamb in the man, for thou has sworn on oath and sworn falsely in man by the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. I adjure thee by the Word of God and the Holy Apostles, and I adjure you by Mary the Holy Mother of God that she force thee into the place accorded thee by God. Amen."

According to exorcists, sacred incantations could cure everything from colds to epilepsy.



experimented with the same materials used by medieval monks. They found that it takes one day to write 100 lines. In the *Codex Gigas*, this equates to half a page.

One person working around the clock would therefore need around four years to produce materials and complete the entire book, which has 620 pages of text and is richly decorated. Of course, a Benedictine monk could not write around the clock. His time was rigidly structured and, in addition to sleeping and eating, he prayed and attended mass at fixed intervals eight times a day. He therefore had no more than about five hours a day to work on the book. From this point of view, the creator of *Codex Gigas* must have spent at least 10 years on his work.

Chanting could see off the common cold

The giant Bible is not only different from other medieval manuscripts because

of its impressive size – the content is different too. The book contains sacred texts, historical chapters, instructions for medical treatment and various calendars.

The Bible fills the first half of the manuscript. This is followed by historical works by Flavius Josephus (AD 37-100), a Jewish chronicler from the Roman Empire, and Isidore of Seville (c 560-636), Bishop of Seville and one of Christianity's first chroniclers of history.

This is followed by *Medica* – a section of medical texts based on knowledge from Greek and Arabic medicine, the medieval equivalent of a medical encyclopaedia.

But not all illnesses could be cured with medical care, medicines and herbs. In the Middle Ages, it was commonly believed that certain symptoms meant that the sick person was possessed by the Devil. Sudden illness, fever, epilepsy, seizures and severe infections were clear signs. The manuscript therefore also contains instructions on how to exorcise illness from the body. Even a

common cold could be chased away with this sacred chant:

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit I admonish you who are cold, for you are seven sisters. One is called Ilia, II Restilia, III Jogalia, IV Suffogalia, V Affrica, VI Ionea, VII Ignea. I adjure you colds, of whatever nation ye be."

Confinement was actually an honour

In the book's calendar of important days in the Christian year, a day of death was added after the manuscript was finished. The handwriting was different from the rest of the work. The day of death was for a person named Hermanus Monachus Inclusus.

No other information is recorded about this Hermanus, but the nickname *Inclusus* (The Recluse) gives a hint. It was given to monks who voluntarily went into solitary confinement to give themselves completely to God. Many different scholars have speculated that this is the author of the *Codex Gigas*, based on the myth surrounding the manuscript. The Benedictines did not use confinement as a punishment, but rather as an honour for a select few. It meant that the monk couldn't participate in the work of the monastery and that others had to bring him food. It's likely that Hermanus was confined voluntarily to write the largest work of the Middle Ages.

No one knows for sure if the mystery has been solved. On the other hand, the book has its own history – containing kings, theft and fire.

Sinners were banished

The Rule of St Benedict is a set of laws with 73 chapters detailing the monks' daily life, possible sins and punishments.

Benedictine monks lived by a strict set of rules. The list of sins included: stubbornness, pride, quarrelling and disobedience to superiors. The punishments became more severe each

time a monk broke the rules. Ultimately, he risked being banished.

However, unlike the myth of the *Codex Gigas*'s creation, confinement was not used as a punishment.

.....THE 6 LEVELS OF PUNISHMENT.....

1st sanction

The sinner was admonished by senior monks behind closed doors.



4th sanction

The sinner was not permitted to eat with the others or sing during Mass.



5th sanction

If the previous sanctions failed to work, the abbot would have to beat the disobedient monk.



2nd sanction

The sinner was admonished in front of all the other monks.



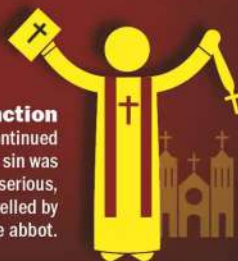
3rd sanction

He was forbidden to join the communal meal and had to eat alone.



6th sanction

If the monk continued to sin, or if the sin was particularly serious, he was expelled by the abbot.



Struggling monks pawned the Bible

The note on the first page of the *Codex Gigas* doesn't just state that the first owner of the manuscript was the Benedictine monastery in Podlažice. It also records that the monastery got into financial difficulties, owing a lot of money to a Cistercian monastery in the town of Sedlec. The poor monks of Podlažice had no choice but to give the giant Bible to the Cistercians as collateral for their debt.

The *Codex Gigas* was already considered extremely valuable in the 13th century and is described in the note as "*librum pergrandem qui dici potest de septem mirabilibus mundi propter sui immensitatem*" ("a great book which can be said to be about the seven wonders of the world because of its immensity").

In 1295, Abbot Bawarus repurchased the book, bringing it back to the

Horns came from a Greek god

The Devil's horns were borrowed from illustrations of Pan, the Greek god of nature. In later centuries, Satan was also depicted with goat legs and hooves like Pan.



The Devil portrait has always been popular. This is evident from the parchment, which has been more affected by exposure to sunlight than other pages.



The Codex Gigas is richly decorated with illustrations, gold and curlicue letters.

Tongue revealed lies

The forked tongue symbolised evil's tendency to lie and speak with two tongues.

Devil wore king's trousers

Ermine fur was an expensive material worn by royalty. The trousers emphasised the Devil's status as the "prince of darkness".

Benedictine Order and placing it in a monastery in Brevnov near Prague. Here it remained safe until the early 15th century, when the Hussite Wars broke out in Bohemia. Supporters of the Church and the Bohemian monarchy fought against Jan Hus, who wanted to reform the Church. After his execution in 1415, many monasteries were attacked and looted by Hus's supporters, and in 1420 the monks moved the *Codex Gigas* to a remote monastery in Broumov.

Distinguished guests wrote in the book

Over the following years, the popularity and reputation of the giant Bible grew, and the manuscript began to attract prominent guests to the monastery. Some of the guests were allowed to leave a note in the book. For example, on page 309 it says: "In the year of our Lord 1591, Brother Bartholomew Salvator was here".

Other inscriptions were more detailed: "In the year AD 1527, on the Tuesday after Cantate [21st May], Ferdinand I, the most Christian Emperor of the Romans, King of Hungary, Bohemia and Dalmatia, Archduke of Austria, spent a night in this monastery and saw this

great book when he was on his way from Breslau in Silesia to Bohemia with his royal and illustrious entourage. And as he had been in the town of Schweidnitz at the same time, he had a rebellious preacher hanged from a pear tree outside the city."

Rudolf II fell in love with the Devil

In the late 16th century, the monastery was visited by Rudolf II, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and King of Bohemia. Rudolf was extremely interested in science and the occult and had an unrivalled collection of books, art and scientific artefacts at his court in Prague. He was enchanted by the huge manuscript that enticed him with its occult history and the eerie

portrait of the Devil that adorned one of its pages. The distinguished guest wanted to own the book at all costs, but not even the

Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire could persuade the Benedictine monks to sell the manuscript. However, they agreed to let him borrow it.

Apparently, Rudolf II 'forgot' to return the giant Bible on loan. A few

years later, the *Codex Gigas* was

included in an inventory of the imperial book collection.

It remained there until 1648, just after the Thirty Years' War had ended when the Swedish army sacked Prague. The *Codex Gigas* was seized as the spoils of war and sent to Stockholm as a gift to Queen Christina, who collected ancient manuscripts. Six years later, the deeply religious queen abdicated and moved to Rome. The book remained in Sweden.

Servant threw the treasure out of a window

In 1697, a great fire broke out at the castle in Stockholm. Legend has it that a devoted servant couldn't bear to see the marvellous manuscript go up in flames. So, he gathered all his strength, carried the huge work to a window and threw it out.

Unfortunately, an unsuspecting person was standing below the window and was hit by the 75-kg book. The person was knocked half-conscious, but broke the *Codex Gigas's* fall, which barely suffered any damage. It was only singed around the edges after the fire.

Today, the giant Bible remains part of Sweden's cultural heritage and is housed at the Royal Library in Stockholm. ■

"... he had a rebellious preacher hanged from a pear tree outside the city."

Emperor Ferdinand I, 1527

DON'T WALK UNDER

Black cats, spilled salt and knocking on wood. Although today we pride ourselves on being more enlightened than ever before, many of us succumb to superstitions that are in many cases thousands of years old.

BY LASSE YDE HEGNET

Veil protects against evil spirits

Many of today's wedding customs are rooted in old superstitions, mainly centred around protecting the young bride from evil.

When a bride walks down the aisle, she invariably wears a white veil. Most people probably don't realise that the veil is a superstition dating back over 2,000 years. Romans believed that evil spirits lurked around the bride and groom, hoping to bring them bad luck. The bride was particularly vulnerable, so she was disguised with a veil – *flammeum* – to deceive the spirits. It's been suggested that the later custom

of bridesmaids accompanying the bride was also originally intended to confuse the evil spirits so that they could not identify her.

The custom of carrying the bride over the threshold also came from the Romans. They believed that evil spirits dwelled on the threshold who could possess the bride through the soles of her feet. That's why she was carried into the house.

WEDDINGS

Lucky superstitions

Sunday wedding brings good luck

According to Christian superstition, Sunday is the best day to get married, as Christ was resurrected on a Sunday.

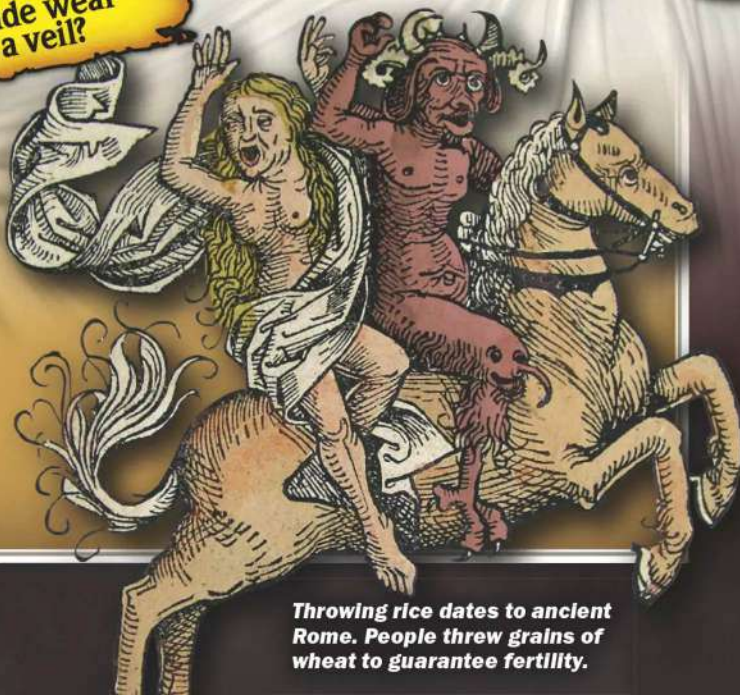
Sun's rays make for happy marriages

According to superstition, it's lucky if the bride is struck by a sunbeam in the church.

Rice shower brings fertility

The custom of throwing rice at the bride and groom dates to ancient Rome. Back then, people threw grains of wheat to ensure fertility in the form of children.

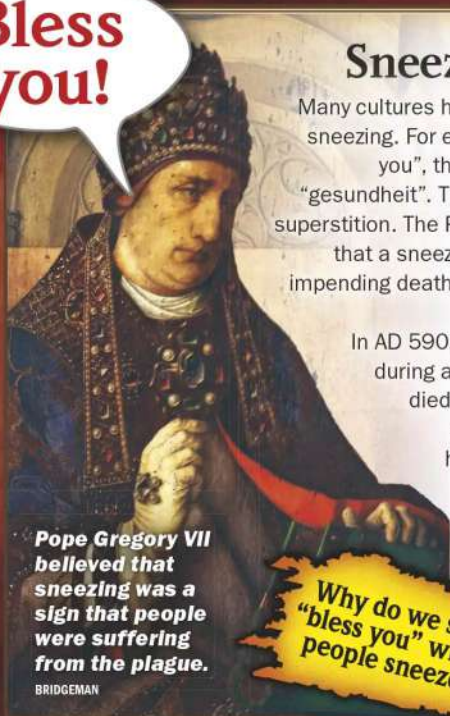
Why does the bride wear a veil?



Throwing rice dates to ancient Rome. People threw grains of wheat to guarantee fertility.

LADDERS

Bless you!



Pope Gregory VII believed that sneezing was a sign that people were suffering from the plague.

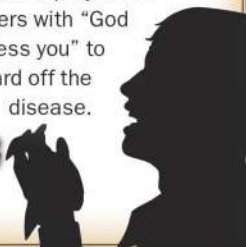
BRIDGEMAN

Sneeze is evil omen

Many cultures have an instinctive response to sneezing. For example, the British say "bless you", the Irish "dia linn" and Germans "gesundheit". The custom is rooted in ancient superstition. The Romans, for example, believed that a sneeze was a harbinger of illness or impending death and said, "Absit omen!" ("May this [ill] omen be absent!")

In AD 590, Pope Pelagius II was infected during a plague outbreak in Rome and died in the middle of a sneeze. His successor Gregory VII ordered his subjects to pray for all sneezers with "God bless you" to ward off the disease.

Why do we say "bless you" when people sneeze?



Index figure causes harm

When parents tell their children not to point, it's rooted in medieval superstition. In the Middle Ages, people believed that the index finger could concentrate evil forces in the direction the finger was pointing. At the height of Europe's witchcraft hysteria, women could be arrested simply for pointing at someone.

Why are you not allowed to point?



BRIDGEMAN

Christianity's worst traitor spilled the salt

According to some stories, the fear that spilling salt is bad luck is down to Judas Iscariot. In Leonardo da Vinci's painting *The Last Supper* from 1498, Judas knocks over a salt cellar as a warning that he will betray Jesus.

However, it's likely that the superstition about salt is much older. In ancient times, salt was a precious commodity whose properties included

magically preserving meat. Salt was so valuable that the Greeks could buy slaves with it.

According to superstition, you can avert the oncoming accident caused by spilled salt by simply tossing some of it over the left shoulder. This is where, according to tradition, the Devil is waiting to strike, but the tossed salt will hit him in the eyes and blind him.

Why is it bad luck to spill salt?

Judas accidentally knocked over the salt cellar.

Sixteenth-century copies of Leonardo's painting of the Last Supper show a salt cellar near Judas's arm.

ALAMY / IMAGESSELECT



Why shouldn't
you step
on lines?

KNOCK ON WOOD

Good spirits in the trees

If someone makes the claim that they're never sick, many knock three times under the nearest wooden table. The idea that the punishment for hubris can be averted by knocking under a wooden table dates to ancient times.

Many ancient peoples – particularly the Celts – believed that spirits lived in trees. By knocking on wood, those spirits were called to the rescue. The superstition exists across Europe and the US, and it's associated with the phrases "knock on wood" and "touch wood".

In ancient times, people believed that trees were inhabited by good spirits – such as elves and dryads.

BRIDGEMAN

Why do we
knock on wood?

Bears lie in wait for careless children

Many children today play at not stepping on the lines on pavements. This may have its roots in the ancient superstition that cracks in roads, floors and walls were openings to the underworld and should be avoided. The current superstition was popularised in the mid-20th century through AA Milne's verse 'Lines and Squares', which said masses of bears were waiting to eat anyone who stepped on the line of a pavement.

Tooth fairy is a mouse

The tooth fairy is a modern invention but is based on an old superstition. It's unclear when this superstition – that if a child's baby tooth was sacrificed to a mouse, the new tooth would be as strong as the rodent's – originated. In the early 20th century, the myth gave rise to a story in the USA where the mouse had transformed into a tooth fairy instead.

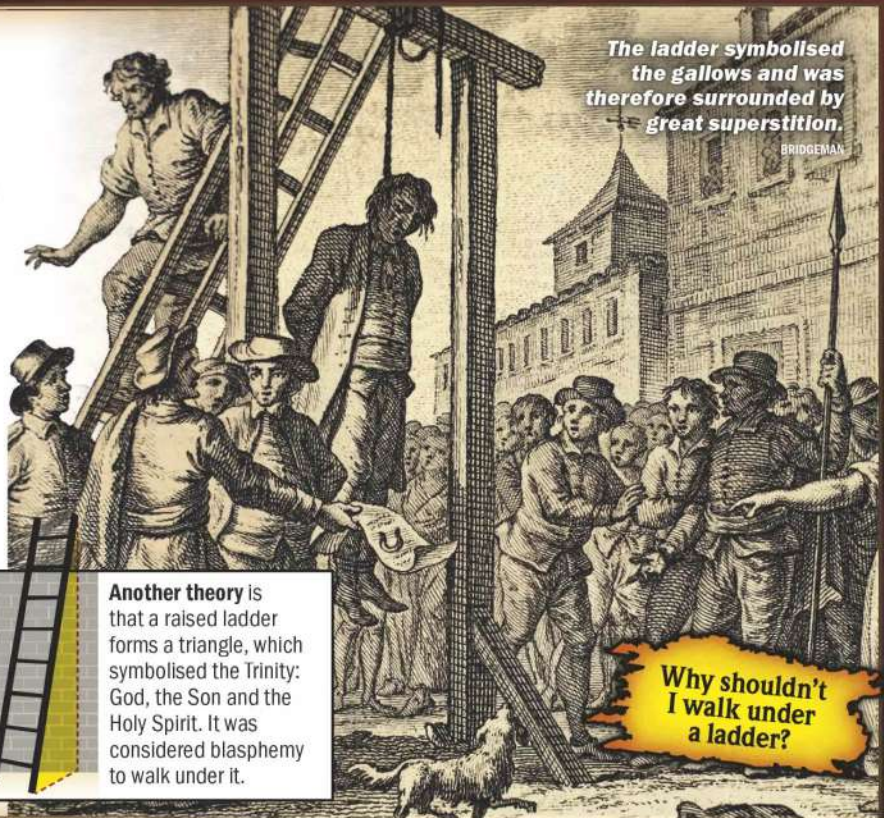
Why do we put
milk teeth under
the pillow?

SHUTTERSTOCK

Ladders could lead to disaster

Many people today are wary of walking under ladders – which makes sense, because nobody wants to accidentally get hit on their head. But often, the reason is centuries-old superstition. In medieval Europe, every major city had a gallows. This area, with all its death and suffering, was surrounded by great superstition.

During executions, the executioner often used a ladder to get up and down from the gallows. The triangle between the ladder and the gallows was where the executed person hung, and people believed that the spirit of the dead lurked there. According to superstition, people who walked under a ladder would therefore suffer misfortune or death.

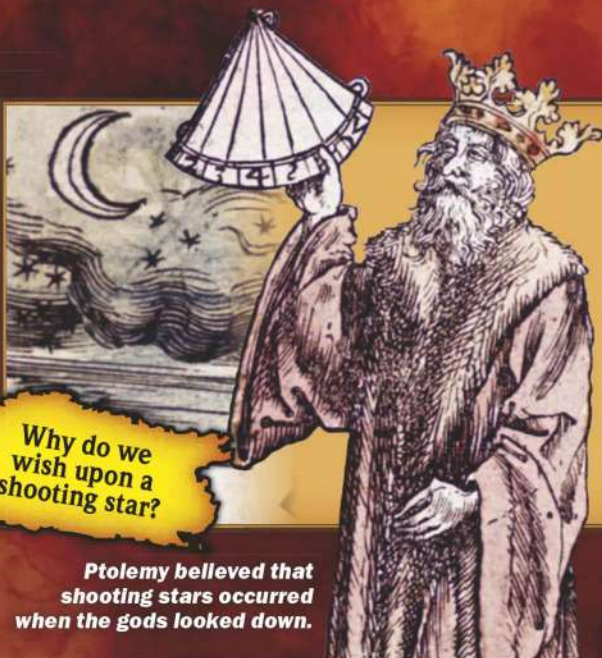


The ladder symbolised the gallows and was therefore surrounded by great superstition.

BRIDGEMAN

Another theory is that a raised ladder forms a triangle, which symbolised the Trinity: God, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It was considered blasphemy to walk under it.

Why shouldn't
I walk under
a ladder?



Why do we wish upon a shooting star?

Ptolemy believed that shooting stars occurred when the gods looked down.

Shooting stars were gods listening in

The belief that a wish made under a shooting star will come true dates to AD 150, and the Greek astronomer Ptolemy. He wrote that shooting stars occurred when the gods looked down on Earth from space. Therefore, it was particularly favourable to pray when a shooting star was seen because it meant that the gods were paying special attention.

The Devil's companion

The cat was considered by Christians to be an animal in league with the Devil. Black cats were particularly feared.

Ancient Egyptians considered the cat divine and worshipped the goddess Bastet, who had a cat's head. The Vikings also had great respect for the cat, which they believed pulled the chariot of Freya, goddess of love. When Christianity arrived in Europe during the early Middle Ages, the view of cats changed dramatically.

Christians feared the cat, which could see and hunt in the dark. Such an ability, they believed, must be because the cat was in league with Satan and witches. Black cats in particular – the

colour of darkness – were considered to be extremely unlucky, especially if they crossed a road. This fear was so great that simply owning or feeding a black cat could result in imprisonment or execution.

Cats are also killed in the thousands across Europe due to the superstition that still prevails in many parts of Europe. Animal welfare groups estimated in 2007 that up to 60,000 black cats were killed every year in Italy due to the ancient superstition.

Christians believed that cats were in league with witches.

AKG-IMAGES & BRIDGEMAN



Cats were burned alive

Up until the 19th century, it was traditional in France to burn cats at the stake at midsummer.



Barrel with cat was smashed to pieces

In Denmark, until the end of the 19th century, it was usual at Shrovetide to "beat the cat out of the barrel" with a live cat.



Cats were thrown to their deaths

In the Belgian city of Ypres, people threw cats off a tower until it was banned in 1837.

Why do black cats bring bad luck?

THE REFORMATION

The battle for God's grace

In the 16th century, devout Christians paid huge sums of money called an indulgence to escape the flames of purgatory. The sale of indulgences angered the monk Martin Luther so much that he started a rebellion. His writings quickly threatened to tear the Catholic Church apart.

MARTIN LUTHER



On 31st October 1517, Martin Luther presented his critique of indulgences in the form of 95 theses.

FERDINAND PAUWELS, 1872 / CREATIVE COMMONS

Indulgence trade boomed

The Pope and a German archbishop made a lot of money from the trade in indulgences - until Martin Luther intervened.

Satire as a weapon

Few Germans could read, so satirical cartoons became a powerful weapon in the battle between Luther and the Pope.

100,000 farmers died

The life of a peasant in the 16th century was hard and grim. Luther ignited hope among the peasants, and a revolution threatened.

GERMANY/1517

The Holy Roman Empire comprised a myriad of small states, each ruled by its own prince. In the early 16th century, the Pope sent out commissioners to raise money for the construction of the new St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

GERMANY
WITTENBERG

Luther closed off a shortcut to Heaven

Traders in indulgences were in a hurry to entice Germans to pay for a new St Peter's Basilica. But in 1517, the deal for God's forgiveness went too far.



Johann Tetzel

As soon as the merchant Johann Tetzel reached a new town, he would set up his stall in the town square.

MICHAEL HAMPSHIRE/GETTY IMAGES

KEY CHARACTERS



JOHANN TETZEL
Peddler who provoked
Martin Luther with his
sales technique.



**ALBERT OF
HOHENZOLLERN**
German archbishop with
debts, Tetzel's employer.



LEO X
Pope had an appetite
for pleasure but lacked
the funds to pay for it.



MARTIN LUTHER
Preacher who triggered the
Reformation with his theses
against indulgences.



FREDERICK III
Saxony's prince-electoral who
hid Martin Luther when his
life was in danger.

In the summer of 1517, a caravan of wagons rolled through Germany. In every hamlet the carriages stopped, and an insistent bass drum called the residents together. Travelling salesman Johann Tetzel had come to town to sell indulgences – the Pope's forgiveness for those sins that could send Christians to Purgatory after death.

At the end of the Middle Ages, people feared Purgatory more than death itself, because everyone required purifying before they could join St Peter in Heaven. How long they would be forced to stay among the searing flames was tough to determine – it depended upon the sin and could easily last for centuries.

But the church promised a way out:

"As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from Purgatory springs," was Tetzel's sales slogan, and village and townsfolk alike queued willingly.

Nobles had to pay six to ten gold florins, merchants three, while peasants could shorten their time in Purgatory by handing Tetzel a single gold florin. The value of the coin was equivalent to the cost of a good pair of boots from the shoemaker. In return, the salesman handed out letters of indulgence.

The money was a good investment, because indulgences had divine power. Tetzel reportedly claimed that his indulgences could even save a man who

had violated the Virgin Mary. Letters of indulgence could also rescue deceased family members who were currently being tortured in the flame: "Listen to the voices of your dear dead relatives and friends, beseeching you and saying, 'Pity us, pity us. We are in dire torment from which you can redeem us for a pittance.' Do you not wish to?" said Tetzel.

Legend has it that a noble knight stood in the centre of a German town. He called himself "von Hagen" and asked for a letter of indulgence to cover a sin he intended to commit the next day.

Tetzel didn't think twice about this strange wish, even though a sin that had not yet been committed could easily be avoided. The knight had his letter of discharge labelled with a salmon-coloured seal. Von Hagen's gold florins ended up in the hands of Tetzel's accountant, who threw them into a heavy oak chest with iron fittings and three locks.

Tetzel did everything he could to lure money out of his audience, and his tricks worked. In town after town, Tetzel's chest was filled with coins, but the money was not intended for the jaded 52-year-old wheeler-dealer – even though he was well paid.

The German tour would benefit two people at the top of the Catholic Church: Pope Leo X and Albert of Hohenzollern, the most powerful archbishop in the Holy Roman Empire, with two

LUTHER'S 1ST THESIS

In his first thesis, Luther addressed the contradiction of being able to buy God's forgiveness: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ in saying: 'Repent ye,' etc, intended that the whole life of believers should be penitence."

*Matthew 3:2

episcopal seats. Both men were desperately short of money, but little did Leo X and Albert realise that their greed would be the spark that ignited the fiercest religious conflict in European history, tearing the Christian Church in two.

Why money was needed

A few years earlier, the 24-year-old Albert of Brandenburg had been appointed Archbishop of Magdeburg and – shortly afterwards – Mainz. Although the Church had a ban on an archbishop holding more than one episcopal see, the young man circumvented the law by paying ▶

Purgatory was a waiting room for the dead

The Bible makes no mention of Purgatory – it wasn't until the 12th century that the idea of cleansing flames took shape. From then on, Christians could look forward to spending several years in a hell of pain before entering Heaven. From the 15th century, it became possible to buy a way out of the flames.

LUTHER'S 5TH THESIS
 "The Pope has neither the will nor the power to remit any penalties, except those which he has imposed by his own authority, or by that of the canons."

Indulgences paid for world's largest church

Pope Leo X believed that St Peter's Basilica would surpass ancient Rome, but the price was high – 46 million ducats and a split in the Church.

Pope Leo X had inherited responsibility for the completion of St Peter's Basilica from his predecessor, Julius II.

Julius had admired ancient Rome so much that he chose his papal name to be that of his role model, Julius Caesar. But he believed that the Catholic Church should outshine the Roman Empire in splendour. On 18th April 1506, Julius

laid the foundation stone for a new St Peter's Basilica right where, according to tradition, the Apostle Peter was buried. Over the following years, tonnes of sandstone were shipped in and the mighty church took shape. The Pope raised money by writing begging letters to the princes of Europe. Construction continued under Leo X, but the newly

elected Pope had other, expensive interests, and after two years, the Vatican's coffers were bare.

Work on the construction site threatened to grind to a halt. To raise new money, the Pope accelerated the sale of indulgences. Leo did not live to see its completion. War plus a lack of money and interest halted work for long periods, so the mighty church was only finished in November 1626 – after 120 years and a cost of 46.8 million ducats.

Church's dome did not meet expectations

The dome of St Peter's Basilica measures 42 metres in diameter – about 1.5 metres smaller than the Roman-era Pantheon temple that Julius II tried to surpass.

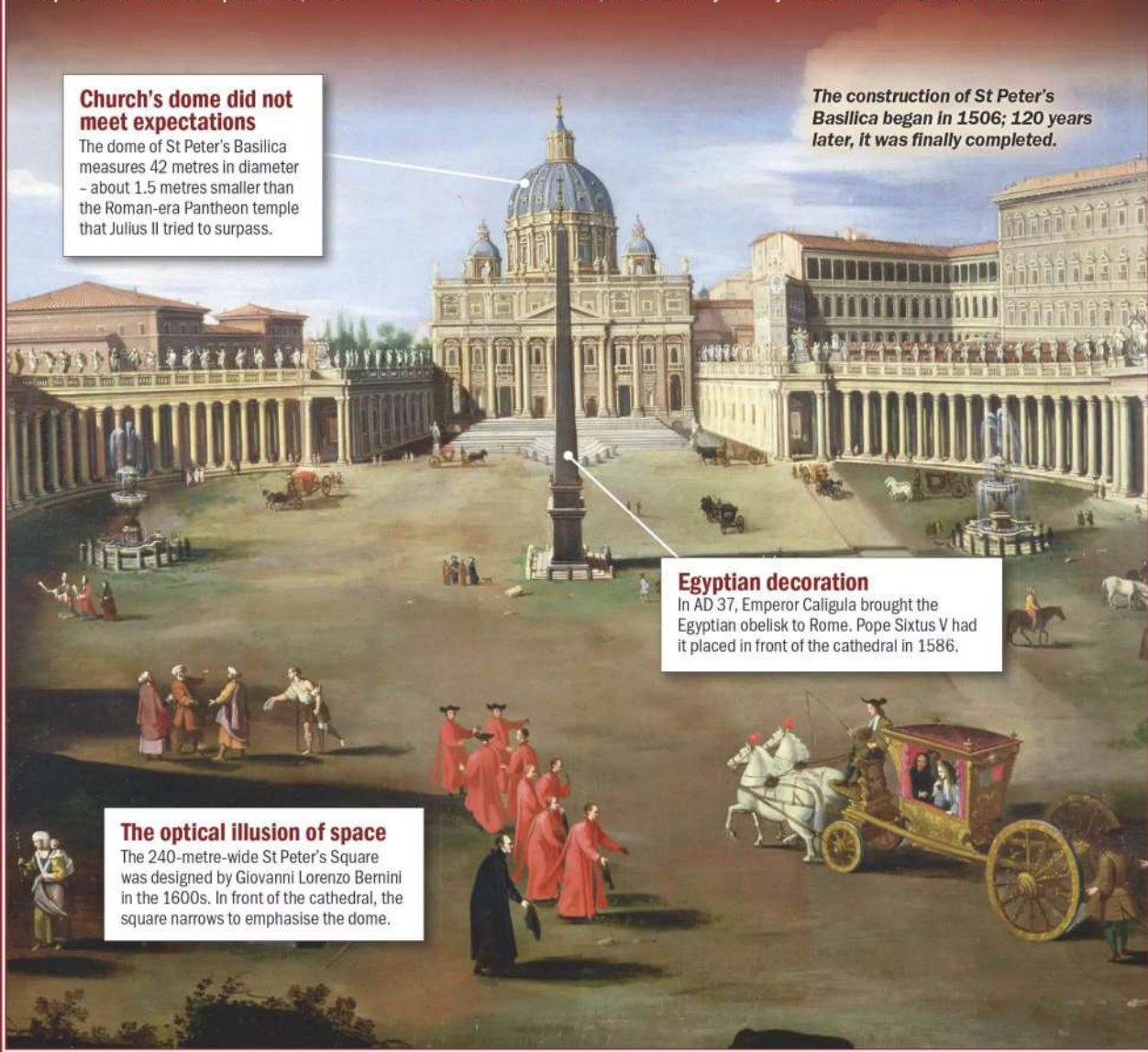
The construction of St Peter's Basilica began in 1506; 120 years later, it was finally completed.

Egyptian decoration

In AD 37, Emperor Caligula brought the Egyptian obelisk to Rome. Pope Sixtus V had it placed in front of the cathedral in 1586.

The optical illusion of space

The 240-metre-wide St Peter's Square was designed by Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini in the 1600s. In front of the cathedral, the square narrows to emphasise the dome.



48,000 gold ducats to Leo X. Albert borrowed the money from Jakob Fugger, the richest merchant in Europe.

Archbishop Albert lived a lavish life and was in a public relationship with an unmarried woman who bore him a daughter. If Albert was to pay off his debt to Jakob Fugger and continue his luxurious life, he would be forced to find an income – preferably with the blessing of the Pope.

Luckily, Leo X was also in trouble. When he was elected the youngest-ever Pope at the age of 37, Leo reportedly said, “God has given us the papacy; let us now enjoy it.”

Leo lived up to his motto. During his first two years, the Pope spent the entire Vatican fortune of 4.5 million ducats – 15 tonnes of gold. Much of his money was spent on fancy dress balls, parties and hunting. At Leo’s dinner parties, guests were entertained with exotic animals such as elephants and leopards. Orchestras and boy choirs were shipped to Rome from all over the Catholic world for the sole purpose of pleasing the Pope. Leo X was not a womaniser, but there were several rumours of orgies with underage boys.

His excesses worried the Vatican accountants, who announced in 1516 that the coffers were empty and that the construction of the magnificent St Peter’s Basilica in Rome would come to a halt.

Scandal could only be avoided if Leo X raised funds in a hurry. Pawning everything from jewellery to cardinal hats brought in some money, but the Vatican was still dangerously close to bankruptcy. Albert’s approach had come at the perfect time – and his idea was temptingly simple: a trusted man with the gift of the gab would travel around Germany selling letters of indulgence, with the Pope and archbishop sharing the proceeds.

Albert knew the right man for the job: Johann Tetzel – a former Dominican monk who worked as an indulgence trader throughout the German-speaking region. He was a born salesman, but money had corrupted him.

Back in 1510, Tetzel had been sentenced to death in Innsbruck for cheating at gambling and living in sin with a married woman. The punishment was death, and the emperor had ruled he be executed through drowning.

Tetzel robbed in the forest

Only the intercession of a German prince saved Tetzel from death – instead he was to spend the rest of his life in a dungeon. Yet he was soon free again, because his special talents were

needed. In 1516, the Bishop of Meissen made him sub-commissioner for the promotion of the St Peter’s indulgence. The following year, Archbishop Albert headhunted him for a position as commissioner of indulgences with the same task. To keep track of the money, the merchant Fugger placed his own accountant on Tetzel’s staff.

During the summer of 1517, the merchant travelled to Berlin, Halle and Magdeburg. Legend has it that he was travelling through the wooded area of Elm between the villages of Königsutter and Schöppenstedt when a robber knight jumped out with his men.

Tetzel recognised him. It was von Hagen, the nobleman who had bought a letter of indulgence the day before. Now von Hagen held the letter in front of Tetzel’s nose – it said that the Pope had already granted absolution for the crime von Hagen was about to commit.

With his sword raised, von Hagen threatened the merchant to hand over the heavy chest with the gold florins. Immediately afterwards, the robber knight disappeared into the forest.

The story has since been told in many versions, and although the crime scene

changes, the moral is the same: the trade was out of control.

Despite the assault, Tetzel continued his tour and sold letters of indulgence with undiminished vigour, but it appeared his luck was finally running out – because another man was out to get him.

Luther was provoked

In the Saxon town of Wittenberg, the preacher Martin Luther had been approached by several parishioners waving Tetzel’s indulgence letters and claiming that they had no need for his absolution.

“I’ll beat a hole in his drum!” exclaimed the 33-year-old Luther, a theologian and professor at Wittenberg University.

After careful Bible study, he established that no one could buy their way out of God’s just punishment. In the sermons that followed, he thundered against indulgences. Luther urged his congregation

to repent sincerely instead of trying to pay for salvation.

For months, he pondered on how to take on the powerful Church. On 31st October 1517, he was finally ready to publish his arguments against the indulgence trade in the form of 95 theses. Legend has it that he nailed them to the ►

***“God has given
us the papacy; let
us now enjoy it.”***

Pope Leo X (c. 1513)

Skip the queue to Heaven

According to the Catholic Church, Jesus Christ and the Catholic saints had done so much good on Earth before they died that they had left behind a large pile of good deeds – the Church took it upon itself to manage this treasure of goodness.

In 1452, the good deeds were sold for the first time in the form of letters of indulgence, the proceeds of which were used to pay for everything from church buildings to hospitals. The letters were the first printed forms in history and could easily be reproduced using the newly invented art of printing.

Indulgences were issued by bishops in the name of the Pope. They

guaranteed the buyer a place in Heaven – without the need to atone for their sins or risk Purgatory. The offer also applied to the deceased.

The Catholic Church banned the trade in indulgences in 1562; five years later, the penalty for trading was expulsion from the Church.

***The letter of indulgence was
the first printed form in history
– with space to include the
buyer’s name.***



Heretics paid with their lives

BOTULF BUTOLFFSSON

The Catholic Church has declared countless people heretics for opposing the Church. One was Swedish farmer Botulf Butolfsson, who in the early 14th century refused to touch the wine and bread during communion. He would not eat Christ, he explained. Butolfsson was condemned as a heretic on 8th April 1311 and burned – the only known Swedish heretic.



Burnt at the stake

JAN HUS

Priest Jan Hus was the dean of the University of Prague and for a long time a scourge of the Church. He insisted on preaching in Czech (instead of Latin) and criticised the Church hierarchy. He was arrested and burned at the stake in 1415.



Burnt at the stake

ULRICH ZWINGLI

Around the same time as Luther, the Swiss priest Ulrich Zwingli had drawn the conclusion that the Church needed reforming. His ideas included believing that pictures had no place in churches and that priests should be able to marry. They spread in Zurich, Bern, Basel, Lake Constance and Strasbourg. Zwingli was accused of heresy and his ideas led to civil war between reformers and Catholics in Switzerland. The priest was killed in battle in 1531.



Died in battle

GALILEO GALILEI

Italian scientist Galileo Galilei discovered that the Earth is not the centre of the universe; instead, the Earth orbits the Sun. This discovery caused great consternation in the Church, which brought the Inquisition down on Galileo. In 1633, during 22 days of interrogation, the scientist was forced to renounce his research. The threatened death sentence was later transformed into lifelong house arrest.



House arrest

The last heretic was executed in 1826. Spaniard Cayetano Ripoll refused to believe in Christ – and was hanged.

door of the church in Wittenberg so that everyone could read his criticism:

"It is certain that, when the money rattles in the chest, avarice and gain may be increased," he wrote in thesis 28.

And in thesis 32 he said, "Those who believe that, through letters of pardon, they are made sure of their own salvation, will be eternally damned along with their teachers".

Luther consoled Tetzel

In posterity, 31st October 1517 has been celebrated as the day the Reformation broke out, but there is no indication that Martin Luther had any idea what his theses would lead to.

Luther didn't even know who his opponents were – at first, he just wanted to start a theological discussion. Luther had no idea that the Pope and the Archbishop benefited personally from the trade in indulgences when he sent his 95 theses to Archbishop Albert:

"I can be silent no longer," Luther explained in an accompanying letter.

Albert, who couldn't possibly do without the money from Tetzel, didn't dare risk an open debate, so he sent the theses to Pope Leo in Rome, warning that Luther was misleading the poor and ignorant.

But the Pope couldn't do anything immediately because he had his hands full: the Ottoman Empire was threatening to invade Christian Cyprus, several Italian cities were in revolt, and a group of cardinals had been caught plotting an assassination attempt against him. Instead, Leo settled with instructing the German Augustinian Order to put the annoying preacher from Wittenberg in his place during their next meeting in April 1518.

But Leo had overlooked the fact that Luther and his rapidly growing band of sympathisers had access to a powerful weapon: the printing press. By the time the Pope's reply had travelled back to Germany, hundreds of copies of Luther's theses had been printed.

"They went throughout the whole of Germany in a fortnight," Luther recalled.

It wasn't long before Johann Tetzel was able to read the 95 Theses. He was furious and threatened to "throw that heretic Luther into the fire". Despite his chequered past, Tetzel was a theologian and believed he could defend the trade in indulgences with solid arguments. He

wrote 106 counter-theses, which he sent to Wittenberg. However, they made no impression on Luther. His students bought 800 copies and burned them all.

Luther realised that the dispute was getting out of hand. He therefore wrote detailed notes in which he held the Pope's hand as he explained his criticism of the indulgence trade. But it was already too late: Tetzel and many other theologians had whipped up a poisonous atmosphere by issuing one libel after another. The writings provoked the temperamental Luther, who responded by describing them as "darkened intellects who had never even sniffed a Bible".

Luther's followers got caught up in the conflict and began to persecute Tetzel. Wherever the merchant arrived with his retinue, he was met with insults. It was a broken Tetzel who in 1518 had to give up his trade and seek protection behind the thick walls of the Dominican monastery.

That same year, the Catholic Church awarded him a symbolic doctorate in theology, but this was no consolation for the man who was struck by plague during the summer. When Luther heard

"A single monk must err in his opinion if he stands against all of Christendom."

Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1521)

that Tetzel was dying, he wrote a long letter to the indulgence dealer: "You didn't start this racket. The child had another father," he consoled, with an implied reference to

the Pope. Tetzel died shortly afterwards, but the Catholic Church's troubles had only just begun.

Pope sent a sharp warning

The growing controversy prompted Pope Leo X to intervene directly. He sent several cardinals to Germany to negotiate with Luther and get him to retract his most critical claims.

But the Pope's diplomatic attempts to influence Luther had the opposite effect. He refused to give in – and wrote even more critical texts that reached thousands of German peasants, farm labourers and craftsmen.

The nobility also began to see the benefit in limiting the Church's power – among them was the prince-elect of Saxony, Frederick III, who had become one of Luther's most important supporters.

Luther realised that he could end up being burned as a heretic, so he once again wrote a conciliatory letter to the Pope:

"Prostrate at your feet," it read in a 100-page letter. "I offer you all that I am

LUTHER'S 28TH THESIS
"When the money rattles in the chest,
avarice and gain may be increased,
but the suffrage of the Church
depends on the will of God alone."

Luther's 95 theses split open the Church

Luther's criticism of the trade in indulgences spread quickly through Germany. Among his supporters was the Elector of Saxony.

One of the most famous stories in history is that Martin Luther nailed a document containing the 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg's town church on All Saints' Day (31st October) 1517.

Whether it really happened that way is doubtful, because the theses were written in Latin, so few Wittenbergers would have known what they were. Luther himself never mentioned the event. The first to mention the scene at the church door was Luther's colleague

and fellow fighter Philipp Melancthon when he wrote the preface to a new edition of Luther's texts in 1547.

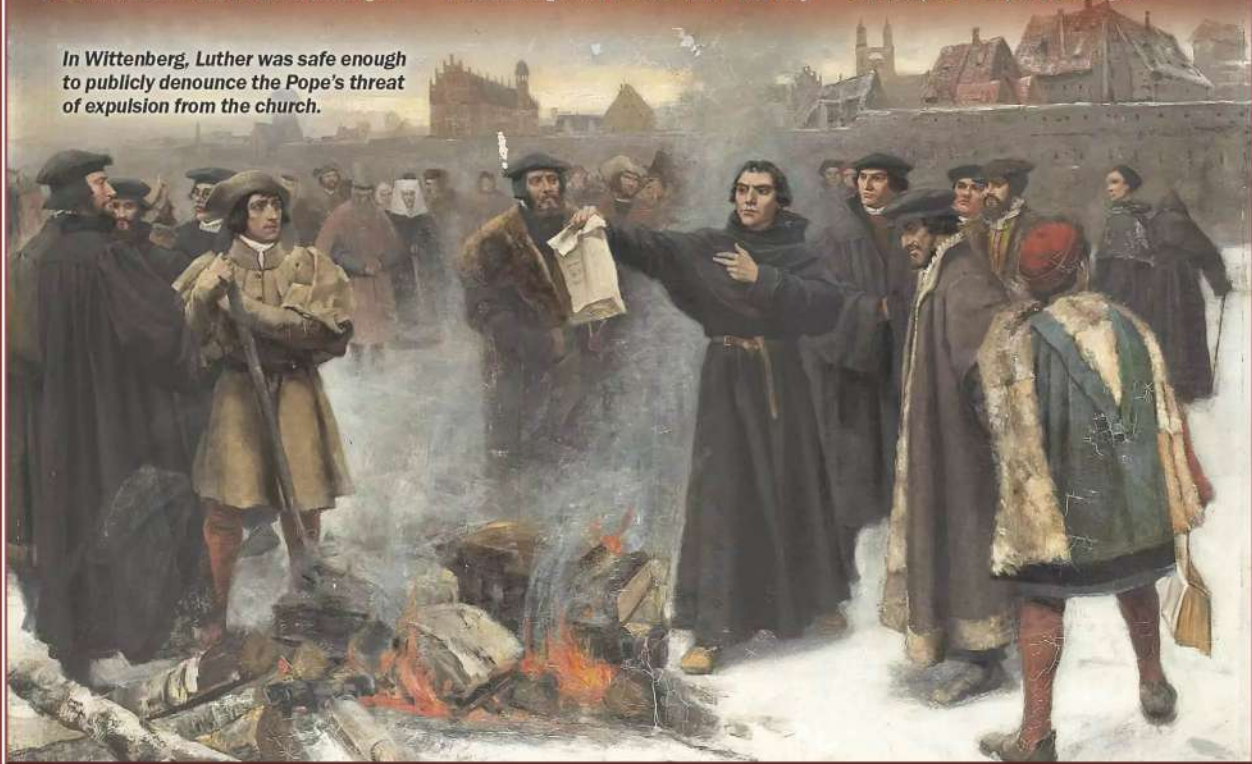
In reality, Luther sent his theses directly to Archbishop Albert of Hohenzollern, whose name was on the letters of indulgence. In addition, a small circle of Luther's friends received a copy, which was quickly translated into German and printed.

The 95 theses were disseminated and the debate gained momentum – not only

among scholars, but several princes also showed interest. One of them was the prince-elect of Saxony, Frederick III, who watched with increasing irritation as the Church expanded its power and was able to amass huge fortunes through taxes and trade in indulgences.

The prince was less interested in the theological subtleties of Luther's theses – Frederick was counting on the Pope being pushed back. He therefore gave Luther protection at Wartburg and Wittenberg, so that the Church's excommunication and the accusations of heresy did not pose a danger.

In Wittenberg, Luther was safe enough to publicly denounce the Pope's threat of expulsion from the church.



KARL ASPIN, 1885

and have. Whatever you decide, I will treat your voice as the voice of Christ speaking and presiding in you."

At the same time, Luther continued to present his arguments against the indulgence trade – and against the Pope's power – at large public meetings in Germany. As a result, on 15th June 1520, Leo sent a sharp warning to

Wittenberg: "We likewise condemn, reprobate and reject completely the books and all the writings and sermons of the said Martin." If Luther did not retract his claims, he would be excommunicated, which would end his right to preach, among other sanctions.

The warning had the exact opposite effect. Over the following months, Luther

wrote three books in which he argued against the sale of indulgences, worship of saints and – not least – the Pope's exclusive right to interpret the Bible.

From a principled dispute over the trade of indulgences, Luther now questioned the entire Church, its hierarchies and the very reading of Holy Scripture. On 10th December 1520, Luther was ready to go ►



The Emperor (left) wanted to hear Luther denounce his own heretical writings, but the preacher refused and was declared an outlaw.

GETTY IMAGES

his own way. In the square in Wittenberg, he burned the Pope's threat as well as his opponents' writings and books of Church law as he proclaimed:

"Because you have confounded the truth [or, the saints] of God, today the Lord confounds you. Into the fire with you!"

The symbolic act could only have one consequence from the Pope. On 3rd January 1521, Luther was excommunicated from the church.

Pope considered Luther a heretic

Frederick of Saxony wanted to give Luther a chance to defend himself in front of the Holy Roman diet – a consultative assembly of princes, nobles, bishops and representatives from the imperial cities. In the worst-case scenario, the assembly could condemn the preacher as a heretic.

In April 1521, as Luther rode 500 kilometres to Worms, the journey became a triumphal procession. Peasants left their field work in droves to pay tribute to him, and in the cities, people gathered to encourage the rebellious

preacher. On 16th April, he arrived in Worms, where he was placed under house arrest at the castle Bischofshof, where the hearing would take place.

In Worms, people also flocked to Luther to see with their own eyes the man who dared to challenge the Pope. Soldiers had to push the crowd aside before Luther could be led to the palace hall. When the preacher entered, everyone in the council turned their eyes towards him – curious to see the rebel from Wittenberg.

Luther was asked to stand, after which the chairman said in a solemn voice: "Martin Luther, His Imperial Majesty has summoned you here for these two reasons: first to know whether you publicly

acknowledge the authorship of the books there before you bearing your name; and then, whether you stand by them or wish to retract anything in them."

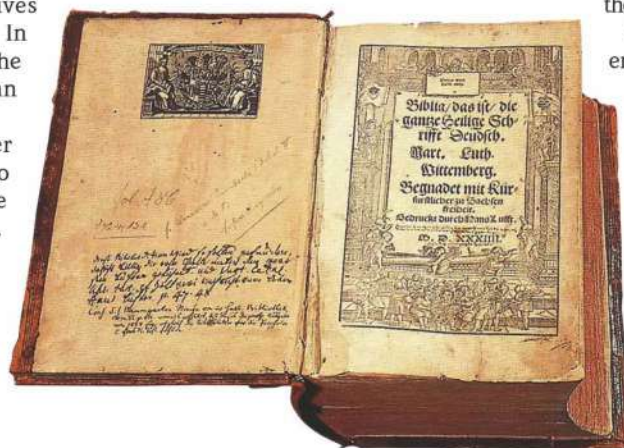
Luther was nervous, because every word he uttered could send him to the stake: "I neither can nor will recant, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. God help me. Amen."

The next day, the recently crowned 21-year-old emperor, Charles V, gave a speech that must have frozen Luther's blood in his veins:

"For it is certain that a single monk must err in his opinion if he stands against all of Christendom; otherwise, Christendom itself would have erred for more than a thousand years," said the emperor.

He regretted that he had not put an end to Luther long ago: "Henceforth, I shall proceed against him as a notorious heretic, and I request that you all conduct yourselves in this matter as good Christians."

In the following days, the diet debated Luther's fate, but before it could reach a decision, Luther fled. His disappearance caused great



Martin Luther translated both Old and New Testaments. The complete Bible was first published in German in 1534.

LUTHERHAUS WITTENBERG

LUTHER'S 37TH THESIS

"Every true Christian, whether living or dead, has a share in all the benefits of Christ and of the Church, given him by God, even without letters of pardon."

anger and Charles declared the reformer and his followers outlaws:

"We want him to be apprehended and punished as a notorious heretic, as he deserves," the emperor's edict proclaimed.

Outlawry meant certain death. If someone killed Luther, they would not be prosecuted because it was not a crime. On a deserted stretch of road en route to Wittenberg, Luther was stopped by unknown armed men who pulled a sack over his head and led him away.

Reformation threatened by rebellion

When the sack was finally removed, Luther realised that he had not ended up in a dungeon, but in the comfortable surroundings of Wartburg Castle. The man behind the kidnapping turned out to be Frederick III of Saxony. He wanted to protect Luther and give the Reformation movement a much-needed respite.

At Wartburg Castle, perched on a clifftop above the town of Eisenach, Luther went to great lengths to hide his identity. He called himself "Junker Jörg", grew a beard and let his hair grow over his tonsure while he spent his days in a small room. But loneliness took its toll on the preacher, who suffered from depression and on several occasions had "driven the devil away" by throwing his inkwell at what he thought were evil demons.

Over time, Luther realised that if he wanted to retain his sanity, he had to

work – do something that would benefit the Reformation. He sat at a small desk and translated the New Testament from Greek to German in just 11 weeks.

His isolation also gave him time to develop his criticism of the Church. In the Bible, he found arguments against various Catholic teachings, including celibacy for priests.

Luther was not completely cut off from the outside world. A steady stream of letters told him about events at the heart of the Reformation in Wittenberg. In December and January, he was horrified to read how unrest and vandalism had spread throughout the city. Luther's absence had created space for more radical preachers to argue in favour of violent rebellion against the Church, and in one case monks had gone on a rampage, smashing the images of saints in their monastery.

On 6th March 1522, Luther secretly returned to the city. To his saviour, the prince-elect, he explained:

"During my absence Satan has entered my sheepfold, and has committed ravages which only I can only repair by my own presence and lively word."

So Luther re-entered the church in Wittenberg, where he delivered eight sermons and emphasised that the Reformation should be a peaceful project:

"What do you suppose is Satan's thought, when an effort is made to do things by violence? He sits back in Hell and thinks: How fine a game these fools will make for me! But it brings him distress when we only spread the Word, and let it alone do the work."

His presence calmed Wittenberg as the radical preachers moved on to incite poor peasants and artisans to armed rebellion.

Martin Luther had started a movement over which he no longer had full control. If his reformation of the Church was not to descend into chaos, he would need strong allies.

Nuns on the run

Luther's words resonated in the monasteries. Several hundred nuns and monks ran away.

At the Cistercian monastery in Nimbschen, Luther's writings passed from hand to hand when the abbess wasn't looking. The nuns were inspired by the upheaval that was happening in the church.

Among them was 24-year-old Katharina von Bora, who had been handed over to the convent aged four. The von Bora family belonged to the nobility, but their possessions could not feed the whole family.

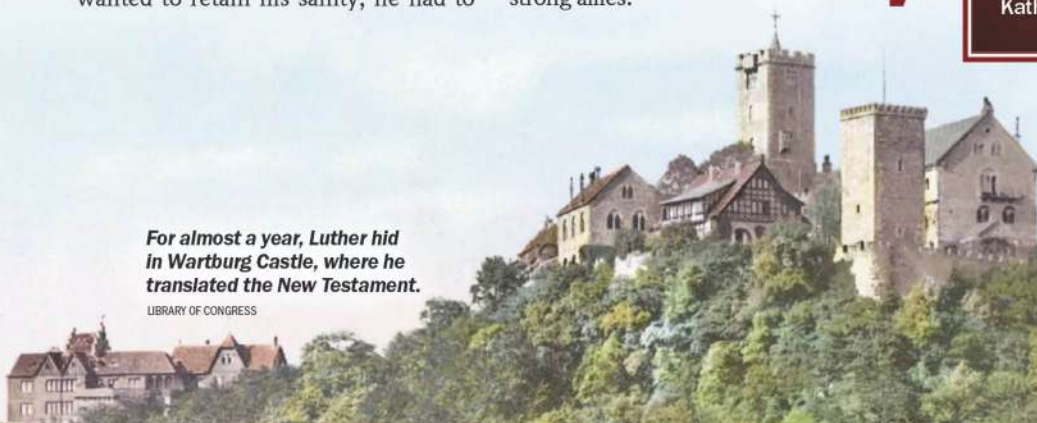
In 1523, she and 11 other nuns decided to ask Luther to help them escape. The preacher persuaded a fishmonger to smuggle them out. The escape was risky – if they were caught, the man would receive a death sentence for "nun-stealing".

The women made it to Wittenberg, but life in freedom was not what they had expected. Society viewed young, unmarried women with the utmost distrust. Even though the nuns had no experience with men, they were forced to marry. As the last of the 12 runaways, Katharina married Martin Luther.



For almost a year, Luther hid in Wartburg Castle, where he translated the New Testament.

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Pope was ridiculed

Satirical cartoons are not a new invention. During the Reformation, both Catholics and Luther's supporters used crude cartoons to mock their opponents. The drawings had an obvious advantage – even illiterate people understood the criticism.

BY KASPER SCHLIE & TORSTEN WEPER



Luther's many tongues

This woodcut from 1529 depicts Martin Luther as a cunning rascal who speaks with several tongues. The preacher is shown as an unbelieving Turk (head no 3 from left), a whirling head surrounded by flies (no 5) and the doomed robber Barrabas (no 7) – the one the Jews wanted spared instead of Jesus, according to the New Testament.



The Devil's instrument Luther accused the Pope of doing the Devil's bidding, while the Catholics believed the opposite to be true. In the print on the left, the Devil blows his messages into Martin Luther's ear, transforming the words into seductive music for the congregation. The bagpipe had been known since ancient times. In the Middle Ages, it was considered in some circles to be the Devil's instrument.

By the time the satirical drawing was published in 1535, Luther had long since given up his tonsure, but the artist, Erhard Schoen, still shows him with a shaved head to remind us of Luther's time as a monk – and his betrayal of his monastic vows.

Pope was an obvious target for mockery and ridicule

The greed and moral decay of the Catholic Church set new records in the 16th century: Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) was a magnet for women, had numerous mistresses and at least seven children. His successor, Julius II – dubbed “il terribile” (1503-13) – had a daughter.

The next in line, Leo X (1513-21), held a large court of jesters, dwarves and exotic animals, such as the white elephant Hanno, who wore red shoes like the Pope. In just two years, Leo had gambled away 15 tonnes of gold.



The donkey in Rome

In 1523, the painter Lucas Cranach, a close friend of Luther, depicted the Pope as a donkey with a scaly dragon body. The donkey symbolised the Church's pride, while the woman's breasts were meant to show that the faithful were sucking nourishment from a false god.

Lust would spread

Martin Luther believed that celibacy was against God's will. But for many Christians, including Lutherans, that very idea was difficult to accept. Monks and nuns were considered the most virtuous Christians, so this drawing of romance in a monastery cell was intended to shock Christians and turn them against Luther.



Scoundrel's parlour in the Devil's mouth

Monks and nuns celebrate in Satan's mouth. The Pope (with the key of St Peter) is also invited. He flies in with a farting demon.

Exposed breast

The Devil is portrayed as a woman.

Desire for money

The indulgence chest is held out invitingly.

The Devil's rear

With his backside exposed, Satan sits on a letter of indulgence and has blasphemously stuck his foot into a container of holy water.



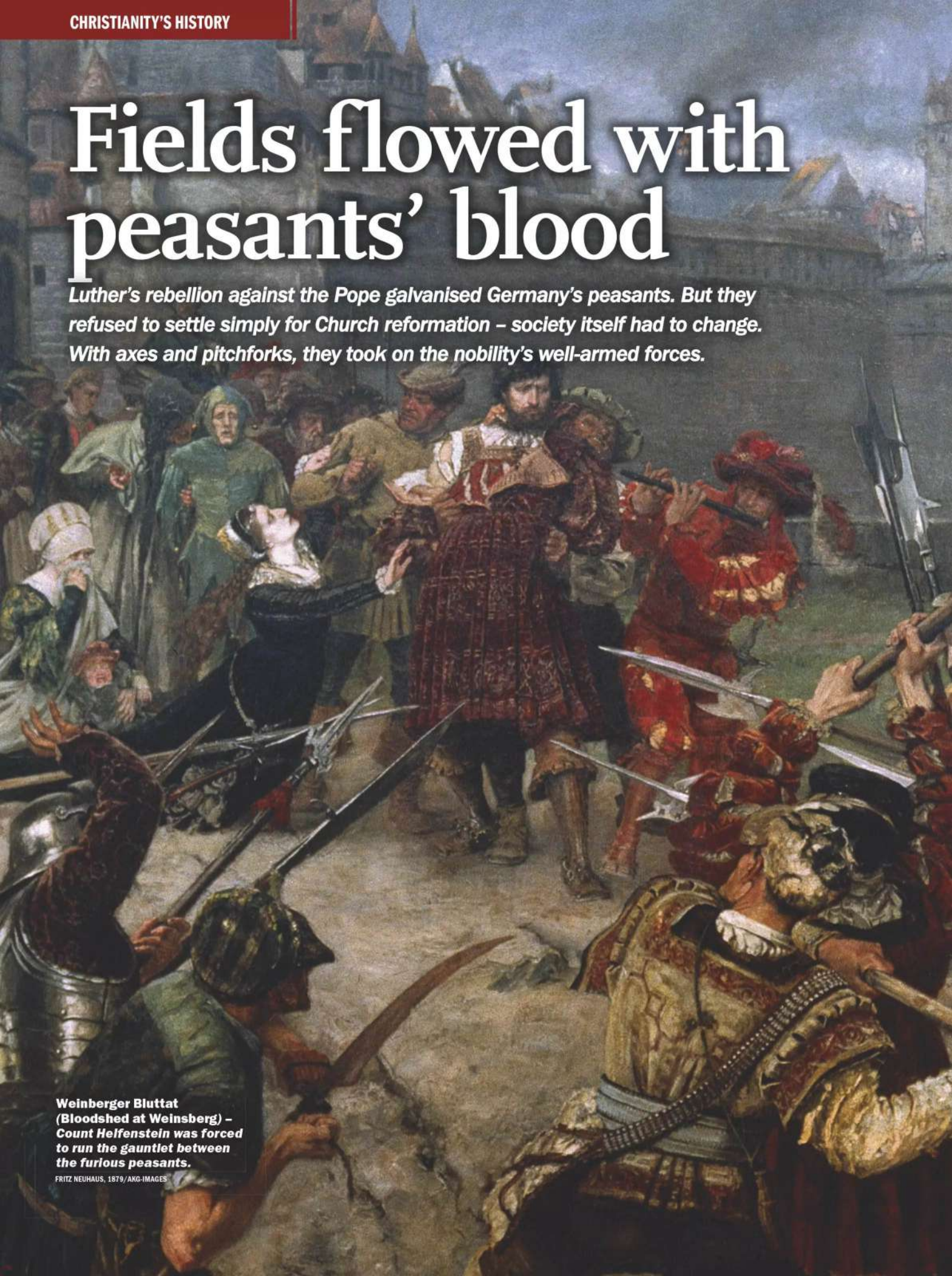
Around 1450, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. It was instrumental in spreading Luther's theses and satirical drawings throughout Germany.

Fields flowed with peasants' blood

Luther's rebellion against the Pope galvanised Germany's peasants. But they refused to settle simply for Church reformation – society itself had to change. With axes and pitchforks, they took on the nobility's well-armed forces.

Weinberger Bluttat
(Bloodshed at Weinsberg) –
Count Helfenstein was forced
to run the gauntlet between
the furious peasants.

FRITZ NEUHAUS, 1879/ANG-IMAGES



Everything seemed peaceful on Easter Sunday in 1525, but Count Ludwig von Helfenstein knew that discontent was rife throughout his villages. As a precaution, the Count assembled a bodyguard of 16 loyal knights and 60 mercenaries at his castle, Weinsberg, in southern Germany. Below the castle, 6,000 furious peasants had gathered, but Helfenstein wasn't intimidated. He gave them an ultimatum: go home – or we will burn your farms and villages.

The message did not come as a surprise to the peasant army's leader, Jäcklein Rohrbach. Counts and landowners treated peasants like slaves, but that's not how it would be today:

"To Weinsberg! To Weinsberg!" Jäcklein shouted to his rag-tag army.

The count still felt secure behind the thick walls of the castle, but some of his men sympathised with the peasants. They opened a trapdoor for the rebels to sneak in while the count was at an Easter mass, and now the attackers went on a rampage. Knights and mercenaries were overrun and stabbed with knives and pitchforks.

After an hour, only Ludwig von Helfenstein and 13 of his knights remained alive. They were taken to a meadow where the 27-year-old count begged for his life and offered 30,000 gold florins in return for his release.

"If you offered us two tonnes of gold, it would make no difference; you would still have to die," Jäcklein replied coldly.

The peasants lined up in two long rows and the knights were forced to run the gauntlet between them. They didn't get far. After a few steps, they were killed by the peasants' pitchforks and axes. When it was finally the count's turn, a musician stepped forward and grabbed the count's hat.

"You have worn it long enough, it is now my turn to be count," the musician taunted before launching into 'The Last Dance' on his flute. The count was given a hard shove in the back and stumbled down among the peasants who immediately fell upon him.

Plundered by taxes and fees

The peasants' assault on Count Helfenstein's castle quickly became known as the Bloodbath of Weinsberg and inspired numerous uprisings in 1525.

For generations, discontent had simmered among peasants, and Martin Luther's showdown with the Church was the spark that led Germany to explode in violence. The peasants

wanted more than a simple reframing of their relationship with God – they demanded a tolerable life here on Earth.

In the early 16th century, a farmer's living conditions were worse than ever. On top of paying tithes – taxes levied by the Church – and rent for their land, the farmer was forced to do unpaid labour for the landowner, such as harvesting and repairing roads.

The landowner owned the streams, lakes and forests, so when the farmer needed water and firewood, it cost extra. On top of that, the landowner decided who a farmer could marry, and when the farmer died, the landowner had the right to charge an inheritance tax so high that the survivors were left with

LUTHER'S 50TH THESIS
"If the Pope were acquainted with the exactions of the preachers of pardons, he would prefer that the Basilica of St Peter should be burnt to ashes, than that it should be built up with the skin, flesh and bones of his sheep."

nothing. Peasants were serfs with no way to escape their life of servitude.

At large meetings as early as 1524, the peasants had formulated 12 demands to the nobility and the Church, including the abolition of the tithe – instead, the money should benefit the local community. In addition, serfdom should be abolished, ►

Poor and downtrodden gathered for battle

The Reformation provided the final push to a peasant revolt that had been simmering for many years. From the gathering of the first army to the final, decisive battle of Pfeddersheim, only 10 months passed.

The German Peasants' War is the name given to a series of clashes between peasants and the nobility's army. The first disturbances took place at the end of 1524, and by the following summer, the fighting had subsided.

During the rebellion, peasants looted and destroyed around 1,000 castles, palaces and monasteries. Most of the destroyed property was never rebuilt – not even Weinsberg Castle, which has been in ruins since 1525.



Landsknecht crushed the German peasants

The peasants were numerically superior, but stood no chance against the nobility's army.

At the head of the nobility's army was the Imperial Duke Georg von Waldburg, who gathered 9,000 mercenaries and 1,500 knights in the spring of 1525. The hunt took him across Germany, and he had an easy time of it. The peasants were only equipped with their work tools – pitchforks, axes and scythes – and many didn't even own shoes.

Once a peasant army was defeated, Waldburg began hunting down fugitives, who were tortured and killed. Among them, the leader of the Bloodbath of Weinsberg – Jäcklein Rohrbach – was chained to a stake and slowly burned.

Georg von Waldburg won all his battles, losing only a few hundred men, while 100,000 peasants were killed. For his efforts, Waldburg received large tracts of land.

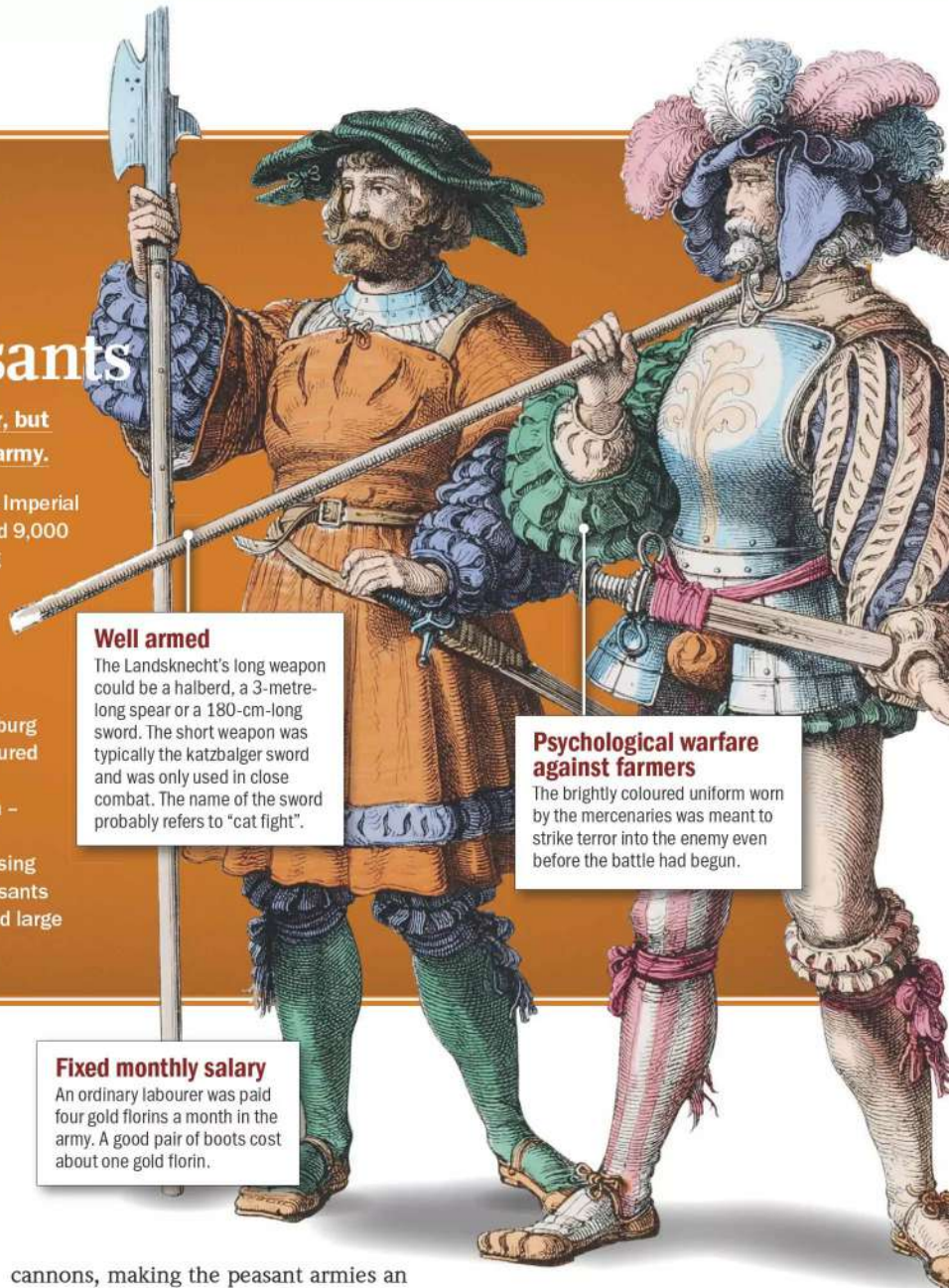
and peasants given the right to use agricultural land, forests, lakes and streams. These demands, which sound reasonable today, were seen as a declaration of war in the 16th century, however.

Luther rejected the peasants

Martin Luther initially sympathised with peasant demands, but he did not want a violent confrontation with nobles and princes. If the Reformation had any chance of succeeding, Luther would need the ruling class on his side. When Luther heard about the Bloodbath of Weinsberg, he lost all sympathy for the peasants. He now considered them “mad dogs”:

“Let everyone who can, smite, slay and stab, secretly or openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful or devilish than a rebel. They have doubly deserved death in body and soul as highwaymen and murderers.”

Among the nobles, Luther's words were seen as giving permission to crack down on the peasantry, who were already achieving alarming results: up to 50 monasteries and castles were burned or looted in the spring of 1525. Among the looted goods were the nobles' grain stores, valuable church equipment and



Well armed

The Landsknecht's long weapon could be a halberd, a 3-metre-long spear or a 180-cm-long sword. The short weapon was typically the katzbalger sword and was only used in close combat. The name of the sword probably refers to “cat fight”.

Psychological warfare against farmers

The brightly coloured uniform worn by the mercenaries was meant to strike terror into the enemy even before the battle had begun.

Fixed monthly salary

An ordinary labourer was paid four gold florins a month in the army. A good pair of boots cost about one gold florin.

cannons, making the peasant armies an increasingly powerful enemy.

German nobility feared its world order was about to collapse. In panic, many fled to the fortified imperial towns where the German emperor could guarantee their safety. From here the nobles planned a countermeasure. They financed an army led by the Imperial Duke Georg von Waldburg – 1,500 knights and 9,000 well-trained Landsknecht mercenaries set out to clear the country of rebellious peasants, most of whom had no military experience.

In many cases, the peasant forces lasted mere minutes before von Waldburg's army overwhelmed and slaughtered them.

Luther was called a liar


The epicentre of the peasant rebellion was in the village of Allstedt, 100 km west of Luther's hometown, Wittenberg. This

was where Thomas Müntzer, perhaps the country's most rebellious pastor, preached. In a letter, he had proclaimed that “the time of Antichrist is upon us”.

Müntzer was referring to the belief that Judgement Day was imminent – and that the nobility was standing in the way of the peasantry's attempts to reach God before the last day arrived.

Müntzer's oratory skills were so effective that he convinced the peasants of Allstedt to take matters into their own hands. In 1524, they burned down a pilgrims' chapel. Müntzer then published several libels against Luther, whom he called a “malicious black raven” and “Doctor Liar”. And in February 1525, Müntzer decided to “strike with his fist”.

Together with his congregation, he formed an army called the “Eternal



League of God" to hasten Judgement Day's appearance by overthrowing the nobility. The army's banner was white with a rainbow and the motto: "The Word of God will endure forever".

The call was too much for Luther, who sent a letter to the nobles of Saxony: "[Müntzer] wants to threaten with his fist and set up a power against secular authority and straight away start a worldly rebellion."

Luther had powerful allies in Saxony, so Müntzer decided to disappear. Leaving his wife and child in Allstedt, he fled under the cover of darkness to the town of Mühlhausen, where he once again found a congregation with the courage to rebel.

Doomsday army readied for battle

On 15th May, Georg von Waldburg and his army of knights and Landsknechts reached the town of Frankenhausen, where Thomas Müntzer's doomsday army and thousands of local peasants had gathered on a hilltop. Apart from eight stolen cannons, the rebels had little more than pitchforks, crowbars and scythes with which to defend themselves.

Von Waldburg's army began the battle with a massive artillery bombardment that sent most of the peasants fleeing down the hill. They tried to get behind the Frankenhausen city gate, but few made it that far as the Landsknechts cut them down with halberds and swords. The hill was stained red with the blood of 6,000 slain peasants, while a few hundred were taken prisoner.

Preacher Thomas Müntzer was one of the few to escape Frankenhausen – but he was captured, tortured and executed soon after. Finally, Müntzer's head was placed on a pole in Mühlhausen, where it served as a warning to other rebels for months.

Other peasant armies did not fare much better. One by one they were defeated by the nobility's Landsknechts, and on 24th June, the last major uprising was crushed in the village of Pfeddersheim, leaving 6,000 peasants dead.

In just four months, the Waldburg army had travelled more than 1,000 km and killed thousands of farmers.

The German Peasant War ended in the rebels' utter defeat, but the nobility's thirst for revenge wasn't yet quenched. Over the following months, countless atrocities and mass murders were committed: in the Alsace region in modern-day France, 3,000 unarmed peasants were killed; in Lorraine, thousands of women were raped,

LUTHER'S 75TH THESIS

"To think that Papal pardons have such power that they could absolve a man even if – by an impossibility – he had violated the Mother of God*, is madness."

*The Virgin Mary.

villages burned to the ground and a total of 25,000 people were killed.

The escaped rebel leaders were declared outlaws and peasant preachers were sentenced to death by hanging, beheading or drowning. In total, the Peasant War and subsequent punitive actions cost 75,000-100,000 lives. The nobility's bloodlust only subsided when the number of peasant casualties threatened the agricultural production on which they depended for their income.

Luther rejected all criticism

Instead of having their 12 demands for freedom met, the surviving German peasants had to accept even higher taxes and stronger control from the nobility.

The appalling casualty figures of the Peasants' War led many clerics to

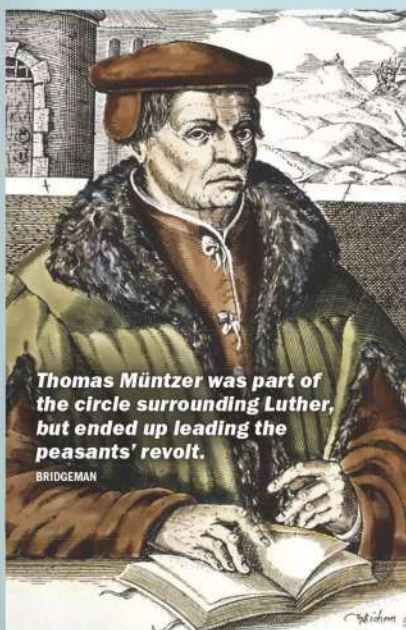
criticise Martin Luther for his words that the peasants "deserved death".

But the author of the Reformation stood firm:

"I must warn those who criticise my book that they ought to hold their tongues and have a care lest they make a mistake and lose their own heads," Luther wrote. "A rebel is not worth answering with arguments, for he does not accept them."

The loss of life had been shocking, but the Peasant War had clearly strengthened the upper classes, the very allies Luther needed for the Reformation to survive – and flourish.

Rebel Thomas Müntzer became GDR martyr



Thomas Müntzer was part of the circle surrounding Luther, but ended up leading the peasants' revolt.

BRIDGEMAN

In 1517, young theologian Thomas Müntzer came to Wittenberg to be close to Luther. A few years later, Luther arranged for Müntzer to take up a position as a pastor in Zwickau, where Müntzer's views became increasingly radical. He identified with the sufferings of Christ and criticised the privileges of the rich:

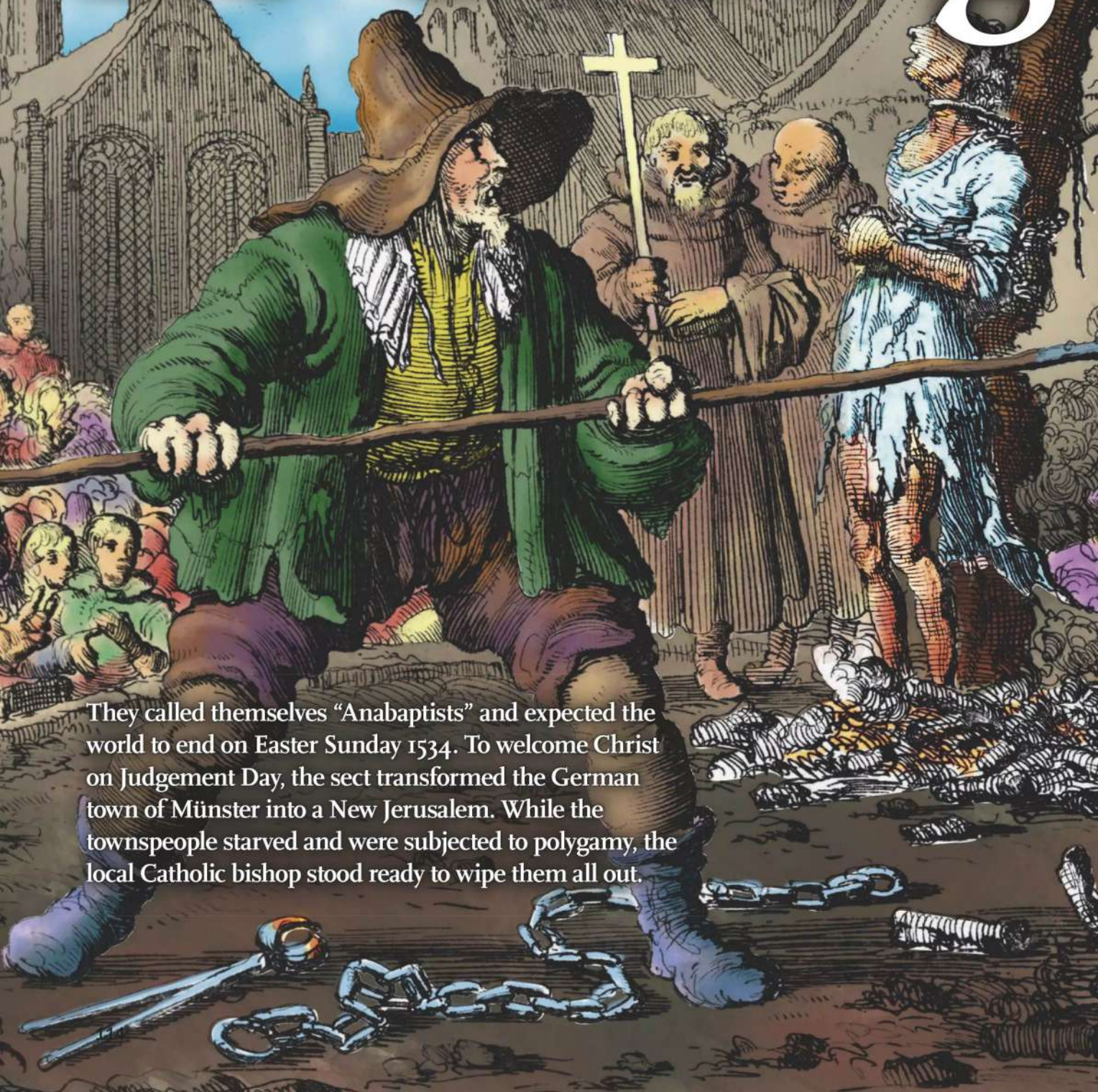
"How can you follow in His footsteps? [Reclining] on a good insulating fur or on a silk cushion, I assume," he said acidly.

Müntzer was forced out of Zwickau and later formed the peasant army that was crushed in front of the Frankenhausen city gate in 1525.

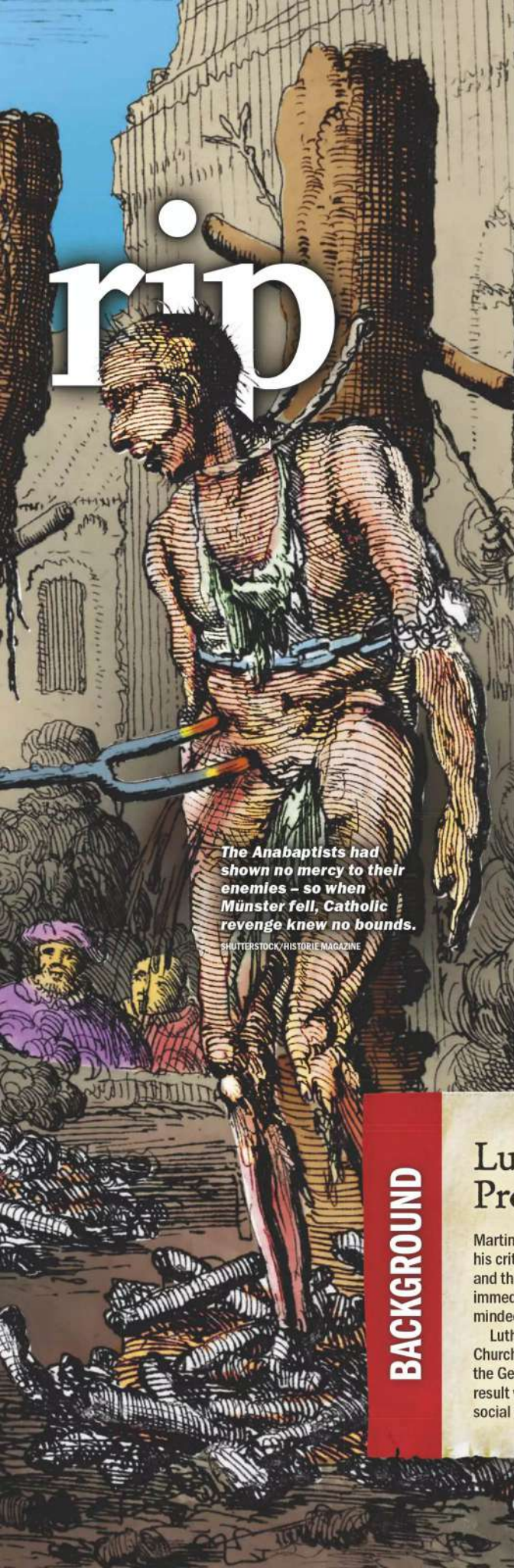
Among Protestants, Müntzer ended up despised – only the East German Communist Party hailed him as a true revolutionary who fought for the working class, putting his portrait on the five-mark note.

Fanatical sect seized power in town:

In God's g



They called themselves “Anabaptists” and expected the world to end on Easter Sunday 1534. To welcome Christ on Judgement Day, the sect transformed the German town of Münster into a New Jerusalem. While the townspeople starved and were subjected to polygamy, the local Catholic bishop stood ready to wipe them all out.



rip

The Anabaptists had shown no mercy to their enemies – so when Münster fell, Catholic revenge knew no bounds.

SHUTTERSTOCK/HISTORIE MAGAZINE

BY STINE OVERBYE & JORIS WEPER

The madness began at the end of February 1534. Members of the “Church of God” entered Münster’s churches to destroy their altars and all other contents. Church pews and pulpits were smashed to kindling and burned. The German town’s hall was also razed. Documents and archives were destroyed because the records no longer served any purpose. The vandals were Anabaptists, members of a radical sect who wished to prepare Münster for the apocalypse.

God had demanded that Münster repent – and the Anabaptists knew how. Before sunrise on 27th February, preachers swarmed through the winding streets of the town, and as the snow whipped in their faces, they pounded on every door:

“Away with the godless! God will straightway awake and will punish thee!”

Armed with halberds, they broke down the doors. Stunned, Münster’s residents made their way through the blizzard to the cathedral square, where other preachers stood ready.

“Kneel!” they commanded.

“I baptise you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen,” the preachers repeated over and over in a session that lasted several days.

Not everyone was prepared to turn their backs on their old faith. Around a fifth of the town’s 10,000 predominantly Protestant inhabitants rejected the Anabaptists’ demand for adult baptism. Instead, they received an ultimatum: leave Münster immediately or be executed.

Most of those resisting were men. They’d instructed their wives to stay behind and guard the home. No one expected the Anabaptist frenzy to last more than a few weeks.

“Get out, you godless people!” The insults were hurled at the displaced Münsterans, who fearfully walked out of the town gates with nothing but the clothes on their backs. The displaced had left behind their families and everything they owned in the way of houses, possessions and money.

Prophet abolished private property rights

15th March 1534 Behind the expulsion of the “godless” was 34-year-old baker Jan Matthys. He ►

THE REFORMATION

Luther gave radical Protestants an outlet

Martin Luther sparked a revolution when he published his critique of the Catholic Church’s moral bankruptcy and the Pope’s greed in 1517. His ideas gained immediate support and attracted a stream of like-minded people to his home town of Wittenberg.

Luther mainly wanted to change conditions within the Church, but others wanted more. One wanted to free the German peasants from the yoke of the nobility – the result was bloody uprisings. Others wanted radical social change, such as Münster’s Bernhard Rothmann.



SHUTTERSTOCK

BACKGROUND

hailed from the Netherlands, where he'd received a religious calling: God had told him that the Earth would fall on Easter Sunday 1534. Only Münster would be spared.

After all Münster's remaining adult citizens had been baptised, the prophet Jan Matthys proclaimed the town "New Jerusalem" – the place where Jesus Christ would reappear to establish the happy Messianic Kingdom. Satisfied, the prophet noted that for every displaced inhabitant, new arrivals took their place. These small groups of men and women hailed mainly from the Netherlands, followed Matthys and wanted to live according to the Anabaptists' commandments.

Inspired by Christ's disciples, who shared everything they had, Matthys introduced communal property. No one could own anything any more – money and jewellery had to be handed in at the town hall.

"All that Christian brethren or sisters have belongs to the one as much as to the other," explained Matthys. In the future, food and clothing would be part of a communal supply so that no one would suffer hardship.

Catholic bishop hired an army

Spring 1534 *After the Reformation, Germany was divided between Catholics and Protestants. The Anabaptist movement offered a common enemy, but the two faiths couldn't agree on how to combat it.*

Münster's Catholic bishop, Franz von Waldeck, was a rather peaceful man who'd voluntarily handed Münster over to the Protestants when they gained a majority in the town council in 1533.

But now that the Anabaptists had seized power in his town, Waldeck risked the Pope taking away his bishopric. Waldeck was forced to act, hiring thousands of battle-hardened mercenaries who began to build fortified positions around the town.

Unfortunately, Waldeck's funds were limited and he was often unable to pay the wages, so the soldiers threatened to revolt. Neither could Waldeck count on the support of the region's Protestant princes; they feared he would simply capture Münster and turn it Catholic again – for its money.

An ordinary day in New Jerusalem

Spring 1534 *God spoke through revelations; all male Baptists could receive them, but the most important came directly to the prophet Matthys.*

Apparently, God didn't believe that the Münsterites were completely honest when they were forcibly baptised. So Matthys called his preachers together; among them was Bernhard Rothmann – the man who'd sparked the religious revival the year before and had been the most fervent Anabaptist preacher ever since. Now he helped shepherd the men of the town to the cathedral square.

"God would have nothing unclean in the town of Münster. He would have a holy people to praise his name," the preachers yelled, forcing everyone into the dust.

Carpenter Heinrich Gresbeck was among those in the square. He'd just been visiting his elderly mother when the Anabaptists took over, so he'd decided to stay in town to look after her.

Now Gresbeck lay face down on the ground, terrified that the baptisers would cut off his head. After an hour in fear, everyone was ordered into the church, where they were forced to kneel and beg to be allowed to stay in the town.

"Father, O Father, O God, have pity on us and admit us to mercy," the crowd chanted. After three hours, the danger had passed – and everyone lost themselves in a frenzied dance.

For now, Gresbeck would pretend to be a devout Baptist, like many of the townspeople. But he was outraged by the Dutch immigrants who'd settled in the town and taken over the empty houses.

Prophet rode to his death

Easter Sunday 1534 *Matthys had predicted the Son of God's return on 5th April 1534. But as Easter dawned, Christ was conspicuous by his absence.*

Dejected, the prophet Matthys realised that his revelation about the Second Coming was wrong. But as he sat at the dinner table with his wife Divara and his closest disciples, he had a new revelation: God wanted him to break the siege of Bishop Waldeck and free the town.

"O dear Father, not as I will but as you will," Matthys chanted as if in a trance. Then he got up from the table and

KEY CHARACTERS

Town's radical son

Bernhard Rothmann (1495-?) Catholics in Münster saw Bernhard Rothmann as a brilliant talent and paid for his theological education in Cologne. Instead, he skipped school to visit Luther. Rothmann returned home a radical Protestant and gave fiery sermons that people came from far and wide to hear – including Jan van Leiden from Holland.

The inquisitive visitor

Jan van Leiden (1509-1536) Jan Bokelson, better known as Jan van Leiden, was originally a tailor, but after his marriage he ran his father-in-law's harbourside tavern and brothel in Amsterdam. After a trip to Münster, Leiden met the Anabaptist leader Jan Matthys.

The Dutch prophet

Jan Matthys (1500-1534) At the age of 20, Matthys joined the Anabaptist movement in Amsterdam. He rose to prominence and was labelled "God's messenger". From Jan van Leiden, he heard about Münster, which they could take over. Matthys became its first leader.

Queen of Münster

Divara van Haarlem (1511-1535) Together with Jan van Leiden, Matthys travelled to Münster in 1534. He left his wife and child in the Netherlands and instead took brewer's daughter Divara with him. After Matthys's death in 1534, Divara married Jan and became first wife in the prophet-king's harem of 16 women.



Class struggle in German market town

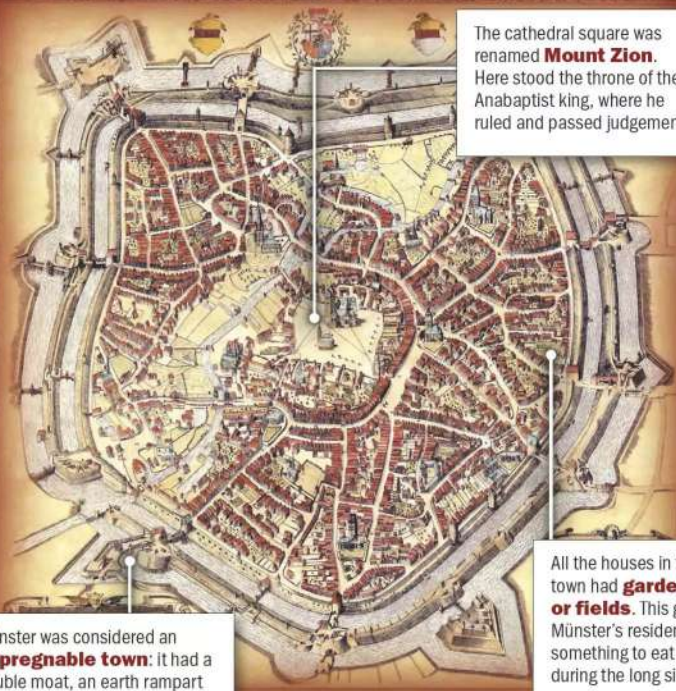
Ambitious artisans were held back by Münster's upper classes, and in the early 1530s, things turned sour.

During the Middle Ages, Münster flourished as a wealthy trading town on the edge of the Holy Roman Empire. It owed its wealth to the Hanseatic League, an alliance of mainly German towns that gave merchants special privileges.

In Münster, the wealthy merchant upper class held power in the town council – much to the growing frustration of its craftsmen. During Luther's Reformation, artisans converted to Protestantism and gained so much influence that in 1533 they won a majority on the city council.

Catholics were resigned to the new conditions, but it soon became clear that many leading Protestants were secretly supporting the radical Baptist movement (also known as Anabaptists), who invited their persecuted fellow believers from the Netherlands to live in Münster.

In the years 1534-35, a Catholic mercenary army under Bishop Waldeck tried several times to storm the city but had to give up due to the strong defences that Münster had built over the centuries. The Anabaptists also had more cannons at their disposal – 86 versus the bishop's 42.



The cathedral square was renamed **Mount Zion**. Here stood the throne of the Anabaptist king, where he ruled and passed judgement.

Münster was considered an **impregnable town**: it had a double moat, an earth rampart and 4 km of town walls.

All the houses in the town had **gardens or fields**. This gave Münster's residents something to eat during the long siege.

solemnly shook hands with everyone: "God's peace be with you all."

The prophet mounted his white horse and galloped out of the town gates. Matthys was unarmed – and supremely confident that God would protect him in his mission to liberate the town. But the German Landsknecht mercenaries made short work of him. In front of Münster's walls, they chopped Matthys to pieces, nailed his genitals to one of the town gates and placed his head on a pole, to the horror of the town's residents who sat frightened behind its protective walls.

Disciple Jan van Leiden took power

8th April 1534 *After Matthys's death, his closest disciple, Jan van Leiden, stood ready to take on his role. But first he had to win over Münster's citizens.*

Jan van Leiden was naturally blessed with good looks, a strong will and excellent oratory skills. The 25-year-old Dutch tailor would need the latter in a time of crisis for the Anabaptists:

"Brothers and sisters, you shouldn't be despondent because our prophet Jan Mathias is dead. For God will raise up ►

CATHOLIC WARLORD

Prince-bishop liberated Münster

Franz von Waldeck (1491-1553)

The Catholic Prince-Bishop of Münster, Franz von Waldeck, knew all about the pleasures of the flesh – **he had eight children with his mistress**. He sympathised with Luther's ideas and did nothing to stop the advancing Protestants, who in 1533 gained a majority in Münster's town council; instead, the good-natured bishop chose to voluntarily vacate his seat in the town.

It was only after the Dutch Anabaptists took power in Münster that Waldeck was forced to act. He hired an army of mercenaries (Landsknechts) and launched a siege. The bishop had to pay the soldiers himself at times and **died a poor man**. On the other hand, Münster has been strictly Catholic since the Anabaptist defeat in 1535.

Bishop Waldeck was far too good-natured to stifle the Anabaptist movement in time.



World's end is effective advertising

According to Christianity, on Judgement Day, while the faithful go to Heaven, everyone else goes to Hell.

The evangelist Matthew wrote that on the last day, Christ will act as judge over mankind as the Earth is destroyed. Jan Matthys, known as "God's Messenger", predicted that the end of the world would occur on Easter Sunday in 1534. In terms of sales psychology, Matthys had a stroke of genius in pressurising his congregation to hastily transform Münster into the "New Jerusalem", but the Day of Judgement failed to arrive, leaving Matthys with a problem that ultimately cost him his life.

Matthys's fate failed to deter contemporaries from other faiths, however, because a prediction of the imminent end of the world has proven effective in marketing new faiths or a new book.

Five predictions

Anabaptism: Easter Sunday 1534 & 1535

At the beginning of the 16th century, Europeans firmly believed that the apocalypse was near. Plague outbreaks, strange cloud formations, crop failures and other phenomena were seen as omens. Initially, the Anabaptists settled on Easter Sunday in 1534, but the date had to be moved to the following year.

William Miller: 21st March 1844

In 1818, US preacher William Miller proclaimed that he had calculated the time of the end of the world based on the Bible. A million people followed him and gave away all their possessions. He later explained that he had been wrong. His followers subsequently founded the Adventist denomination.

Jehovah's Witnesses: 1874 (first time)

The community's founder, Charles Taze Russell, announced that the Year of the Lord would come in 1874, but it didn't happen. Therefore, the date was moved to 1878, 1881, 1910 and so on. The latest date was 1984.

Mormons: 1891

The founder of the Mormon Church, Joseph Smith, predicted in 1835 that the second coming would be within the next 56 years.

Michael Drosnin: 2012

The American author published *The Bible Code* (1997), in which he claimed to have found an unidentified message in the Old Testament: a comet would destroy the Earth in 2012. The book became an international bestseller, but the Earth did not end. "The code is not a crystal ball," Drosnin said during a press conference in 2015.

another who will be even greater and higher than Jan Mathias was. For it's God's will that he should die in this way."

Determined to secure power, the self-assured van Leiden dissolved the town council and installed a council of elders with 12 prominent Anabaptists as members. He also toughened the law: anyone suspected of collaborating with the Antichrist – in the person of the bishop – risked execution. The death penalty also applied to theft, deceit and disobedience to God.

At the same time, the town's new ruler introduced a strict system of forced labour: everyone would now work in both civilian and military spheres to contribute to the community. He also attempted to erase social dividing lines by ordering citizens to wear simple clothes so that no one stood out from the crowd.

Hille tried to lure bishop into a honey trap

16th June 1534 *One of the Anabaptists, Hille Feicken, devised a sinister plan. She planned to seduce the womanising Bishop Waldeck and kill him to lift the siege of Münster.*

Young Hille Feicken from the Netherlands accompanied her husband Psalmus to Münster to join the Anabaptist movement. Every day she worked on strengthening the town wall to repel the bishop's countrymen.

But maybe it was possible to get ahead of the enemy – by killing him, she mused. She remembered a story from the Old Testament in which a woman, Judith, saved Israel by sneaking into the Babylonian camp and seducing the brutal general Holofernes (Book of Judith, chapter 16, verses 8-9):

"[She] anointed her face with ointment, and bound her hair in a tire, and took a linen garment to deceive him. Her sandals ravished his eyes, her beauty took his mind prisoner, and the fauchion [sword] passed through his neck."

Hille felt the call to save Münster and, like Judith, she knew how to go about it. Early in the morning and with the blessing of the Council of Elders, she snuck out of town to seek out Waldeck in his camp. Everyone knew that the bishop was anything but chaste.

But unlike Judith, the brave Hille did not escape the attack unscathed. The bishop suspected something was up and Hille was captured. Under torture, she confessed her plan and Waldeck ordered her beheaded. Her body was then tied to a wheel and raised on a pole so the people of Münster couldn't fail to see her mutilated body.

Prophet introduced polygamy

23rd July 1534 *Münster's population was heavily skewed: around 2,000 adult men and around 6,000 women. Prophet van Leiden planned to correct this imbalance by introducing polygamy.*

"Grow and increase yourselves," proclaimed Jan van Leiden with a quote from Genesis in the Old Testament.

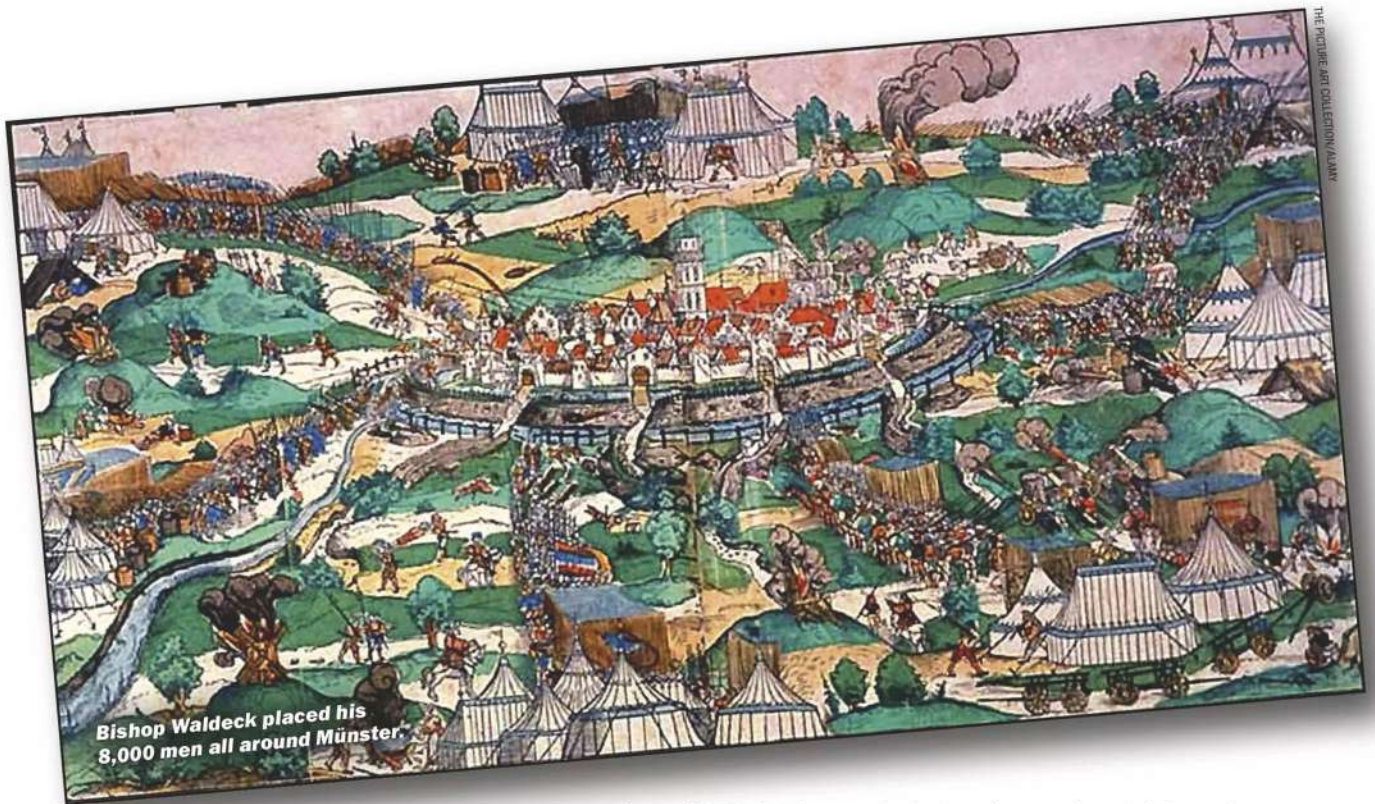
With these words, he introduced polygamy to Münster and stated that the more women a man took, the more Christian he was. Polygamy was God's will, he insisted, referring to King David who, according to the Bible, had several wives.

Van Leiden led by example, acquiring an entire harem. He married a total of 16 women – one of whom was the 23-year-old widow of the late prophet Matthys, Divara,

SHUTTERSTOCK



Paintings of Christ rising again on the Day of Judgement have accompanied Christianity since the Middle Ages.



whom he made his first wife. The others in the group were attractive girls, mostly in their teens.

The prophet ruled that no woman could oppose marriage – even if she was already married to a man who'd been driven out of town. The women – including the town's nuns – had a duty to marry. If a woman resisted, she would be locked up in a convent where preachers would try to change her mind. If she still refused, she would be sentenced to death.

Officially, the new regulation served only one purpose – procreation – but the authorisation of polygamy unleashed chaos in Münster; men scurried from house to house to round up women, and even girls as young as 11 years old were hunted like wild animals. This resulted in a series of rapes, and several girls died because of the adult men's abuse.

In many homes, there was a poisonous atmosphere. Women were embarrassed to see their living rooms and bedrooms invaded by two, three or more rivals brought home by their husbands.

At van Leiden's home, however, cohabitation was regulated; his 16 wives had their names on small boards. When bedtime approached, the prophet pushed the chosen one's name forward. If she didn't want to acquiesce, she could point to someone else – unlike her, however, they couldn't turn down a night with the prophet.

Disgruntled blacksmith attempted a coup

30th July 1534 *It wasn't just women who opposed polygamy – many men were also outraged. Until now, they'd tried to accommodate Anabaptist ideas, but now they started to plot together.*

Blacksmith Heinrich Mollenhecke had seen enough. In his eyes, polygamy was completely ungodly – and he longed for the days before the Anabaptists turned his town upside

down: "O God in heaven, look down here and punish the great wrong that's taking place in this town, and whoever is wrong, may You punish him!" was his evening prayer.

In secret, the blacksmith gathered the men he knew shared his moral abhorrence. They devised a plot against van Leiden and his right-hand man, Mayor Bernd Knipperdolling. The rebels' plan was to overthrow the town government and place Münster back in the bishop's hands.

On the night of 30th July, Mollenhecke and 46 accomplices abducted the prophet and the mayor before entrenching themselves in the basement of the town hall, where the Anabaptists had stashed a large supply of food and good wine in barrels.

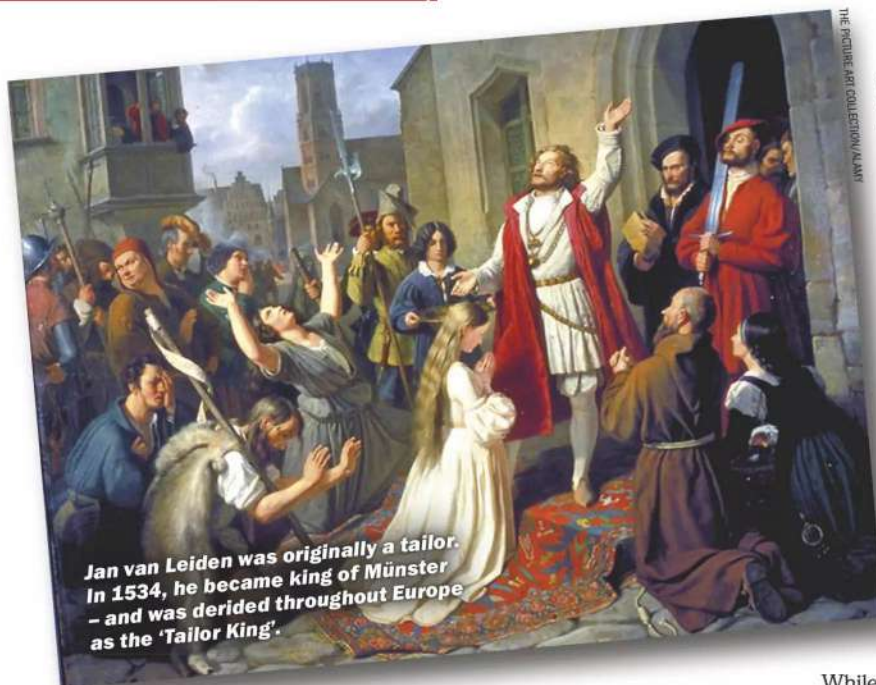
Soon the building was surrounded by loyal Anabaptists who started firing at the walls. The hail of bullets unnerved the rebels, who opened a barrel of wine to regain their courage. But stress and sleep deprivation mixed with alcohol was a dangerous cocktail. Once intoxicated, the abductors eventually released their prisoners. Within days they'd been executed and their bodies dumped in a mass grave.

Bishop attacked the Anabaptist kingdom

31st August 1534 *Bishop Waldeck had finally received help from Protestant princes. The army now numbered 8,000 mercenaries, ready to overcome the town's defences.*

Before dawn, the bishop's army began bombarding the town walls, but the defences were strong and the army's heavy stone balls did little damage. Then the Landsknecht mercenaries stormed towards six of Münster's gates, where they were met by fearless Anabaptists who took the fight to the soldiers from the top of the town wall. The Anabaptists poured boiling water on their enemies, flung boulders and fired cannons placed in the town's church towers.

Jan van Leiden monitored the battle from horseback, from where he issued orders. He turned out to be a ►



Jan van Leiden was originally a tailor. In 1534, he became king of Münster – and was derided throughout Europe as the 'Tailor King'.

natural commander and by the end of the battle, 2,000 mercenaries were left dead, while hundreds of Waldeck's soldiers had switched sides.

A mutiny broke out in the bishop's camp. Many of the Landsknechts chose to depart, halving the size of the army and leaving the bishop with fewer than 4,000 men at his disposal. Inside Münster, however, there was great rejoicing. The Anabaptists had just defeated a numerically superior and battle-hardened enemy.

"Dear brothers, don't we have a strong God? He helped us. It's not through our might that this has happened. Let us now be joyous and let us now thank the Father," van Leiden urged his townspeople. Grateful, everyone began to dance joyously – God was with them.

God appointed Anabaptist king

September 1534 *One of the town's goldsmiths had seen in a revelation that Jan van Leiden would be king of the "New Jerusalem". Strangely enough, the prophet had received the same divine message.*

All members of the Council of Elders proclaimed Prophet Leiden as the supreme ruler of the Anabaptist kingdom. King Jan was crowned in a solemn ceremony, naming his first wife, Divara, as queen. They both wore heavy gold crowns set with precious stones – made from the melted-down jewellery confiscated from the town's residents.

The king dismissed the Council of Elders, appointed Mayor Bernd Knipperdolling as prime minister and established a court of servants and bodyguards, all dressed in velvet and the purest silk – fabrics previously banned.

In the cathedral square, now dubbed "Mount Zion", the newly crowned monarch set up a silk throne, where he held court with a sceptre in his hand, thick gold rings on his fingers and golden chains around his neck.

From his throne, he issued orders and judged trials. Prime Minister Knipperdolling had supposedly given up one of his previous jobs as "sword bearer", but if the king chose not to take the heavy sword in his hands, Knipperdolling resumed his former role as executioner.

Severe famine broke out

26th April 1535 *For months, Bishop Waldeck had blocked all supplies to Münster. The Anabaptists would be starved to submission.*

All the cows had been slaughtered, all the horses eaten, the granaries lay empty and there wasn't so much as a crumb of dry bread to distribute to Münster's emaciated citizens. Some had died of starvation, others now struggled to walk.

"Anyone who still has something must share with his brother," thundered the Anabaptist king, commanding his deacons to search every home once more to seize the last crumbs – a handful of salt, a sprinkle of flour, anything.

"If the deacons find something that you've hidden away, they'll take it from you, and you will be punished for it," warned King Jan, who wasn't in need himself. Anticipating famine, he'd ordered his servants to fill his own cellar with wine, beer, grain and salted meat.

While he and his court continued to feast, the townspeople were so desperate that they scraped lime from the church walls and mixed it with water to make a milky porridge. They attacked dogs, cats, rats, mice, frogs, snails – anything living, they killed. Grass and moss, even an old shoe was put on the plate, and as more and more people succumbed to hunger, the king realised that he must intervene.

Now he encouraged women, the elderly and more than 1,000 young children to flee the Anabaptist kingdom. They were driven through the town gates, but no help was forthcoming. The bishop suspected the refugees of being infected with Anabaptist thoughts and refused to let them into his camp. Instead, they starved to death in no-man's land.

All that remained in Münster was the king, his court and almost 2,000 armed men and selected wives.

Disgruntled wife lost her head

12th June 1535 *The gap between king and people was now obscene. Members of the court strutted around well fed, while hunger in the town grew.*

Elisabeth Wandscherer, one of the king's 16 wives, was ashamed. It couldn't be God's will that the subjects suffered while the royals lived in luxury, she thought. Wracked with guilt, she took off all her expensive jewellery and begged van Leiden to do the same.

"It was God who made me into a king. I'll wear the golden chains and I won't ask anybody about this, in contempt of you," the king said dismissively.

Dejected, Elisabeth asked for permission to leave the Anabaptist kingdom. Furious at his wife's disloyalty, van Leiden sentenced her to death instead. At the public execution on "Mount Zion", he personally chopped off her head.

"God has commanded that you must die," King Jan declared, signalling to his musicians. Cheering, the spectators joined hands and danced around the lifeless body.

Gresbeck the carpenter switched sides

24th June 1535 *One month earlier, Heinrich Gresbeck escaped the town. The bishop spared his life because*

Gresbeck had vital knowledge about Münster's defences. Now he led the army into the town.

Hidden in the inky black night, Gresbeck swam across the moat to a town gate that he knew was poorly guarded. Around his waist was a cord tied to a wooden bridge that floated in the water behind him. Once he'd crawled ashore, Gresbeck set the bridge in place and within moments the Landsknechts had stormed across. The town guards remained asleep, so the soldiers were able to move swiftly from house to house, killing the male inhabitants without mercy.

Alarmed by screams of terror, Münster finally woke up and tried to fight off the enemy. Throughout the night, bloody battles were fought in the streets, but the starving townspeople stood no chance against the Landsknechts.

By morning, around 600 Münsterians had been killed and the rest had surrendered to the bishop's troops. Among the prisoners were the king, his sword bearer Bernd Knipperdolling, and council member Bernd Krechting.

Virtually all male residents and Queen Divara were executed, while the town's women had no option other than to renounce their Anabaptist faith and leave. In the confusion, the rabid preacher Bernhard Rothmann escaped.

Three prisoners were skinned alive

22nd January 1536 *After six months of interrogation and torture, the Anabaptist king and two of his men were hauled before the scaffold in Münster.*

Bishop Waldeck and a large crowd watched silently as the executioners tied the three condemned Anabaptist leaders to stakes in front of the town hall. With red-hot irons, the executioners burned the men's bodies so that a pervasive stench of burning flesh wafted through the air. Silently, the Anabaptist king endured his torment, while Knipperdolling and Krechting roared in pain.

"Father, in thine hands I place my soul," chanted the deposed king as the torture continued.

After a few hours of torture, the men were more dead than alive when their tongues were pulled out with pliers. The executioners then plunged a dagger into each man's heart. The three bodies were then carried to St Lamberti Church and placed in iron cages made by a blacksmith for the occasion. Each cage measured almost two metres in height and weighed over 200 kg. The bishop's men hoisted the cages up the church spire on ropes – the top one contained the mutilated, decapitated body of the Anabaptist king.

The men who'd kept Münster in an iron grip for a year and a half were now on display for all to see.

Postscript: *After 1536, there were still small Anabaptist congregations in the Netherlands and Germany, brought together by the preacher Menno Simons. They called themselves Mennonites, lived in isolation and rejected violence. But everywhere, Anabaptists were persecuted.*

In the late 16th century, Mennonites were allowed to practise freely in some areas of Europe, but brutal persecution continued elsewhere. From the 18th century, Mennonites emigrated in large numbers to North and South America, where some of them formed new denominations, including the Amish. Today, there are approximately 1.3 million Mennonites worldwide. ■

Cages still hang on church spire

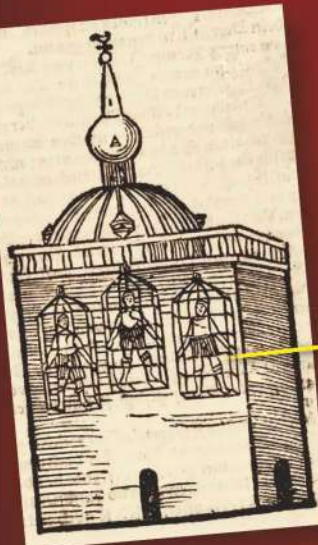
Münster has been strictly Catholic since the bloodbath of 1536 and the city continues to mock Anabaptists.

As a brutal reminder of the executions of the three leading Münster Anabaptists in January 1536, their cages hang to this day on the spire of St Lamberti Church on Prinzipalmarkt in the heart of the city – despite the church tower having been refurbished and even rebuilt several times.

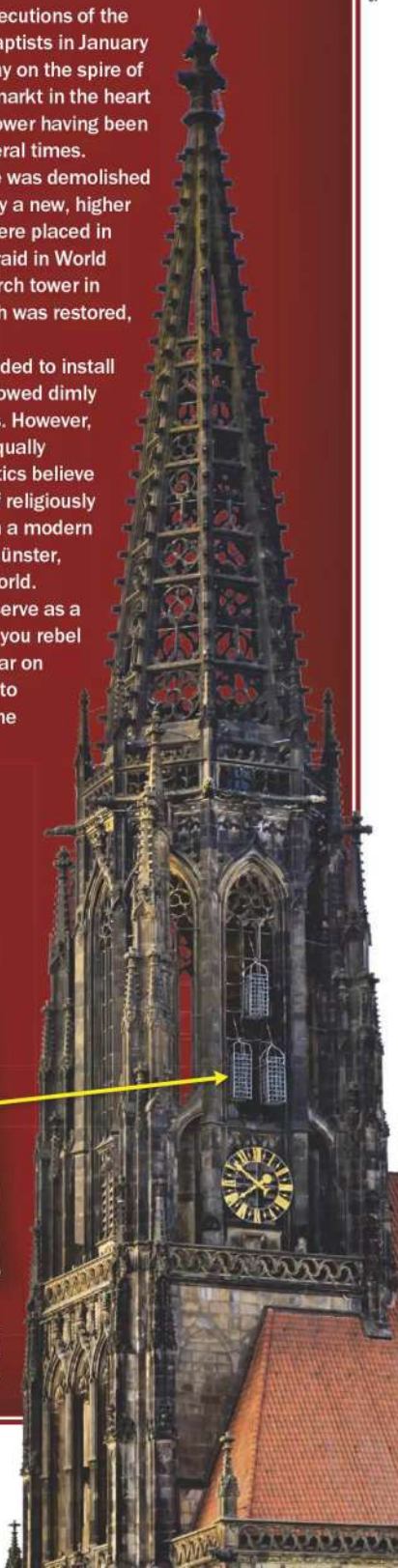
Due to decay, the original spire was demolished in the late 1800s and replaced by a new, higher church tower, where the cages were placed in 1898. During a British bombing raid in World War II, a direct hit struck the church tower in 1944. Four years later, the church was restored, and the three cages rehung.

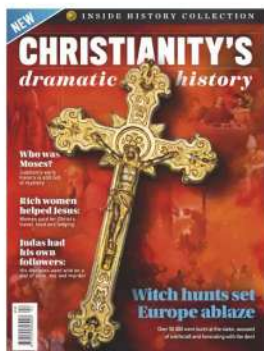
In 1987, the congregation decided to install light bulbs in the cages, which glowed dimly in memory of the three lost souls. However, not all residents of the city are equally enthusiastic about the cages; critics believe that the demonstrative display of religiously motivated cruelty has no place in a modern and tolerant university city like Münster, with students from all over the world.

Supporters believe the cages serve as a reminder of what happens when you rebel against the social order. Every year on 25th June, the city holds a mass to thank God for liberating it from the Anabaptist reign of terror.



Even though the church has been rebuilt, the cages remain in place to this day.





Christianity's dramatic history

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INSIDE HISTORY COLLECTION IS PUBLISHED BY:
Bonnier Publications International AS,
PB 543, 1411 Kolbotn, Norway.

ISSN: 2535-8065

PRINTED BY: Poligrafijas Grupa Mukusala, Ltd.

MARKETING/DISTRIBUTION UK AND EXPORT:
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Christianity's dramatic history

Christianity has shaped history for over 2,000 years. Despite preaching charity and justice, its influence has often led to violence. Religious wars have torn kingdoms apart, toppled rulers, and led to the execution of thousands of non-believers.

Conversely, Christian monks have helped build some of Europe's most beautiful cathedrals. Here, we trace the journey of the Jews, Jesus and his followers through the evolution of Christianity, including the tumultuous post-Reformation period.

